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West Wind

Cyrus Townsend Brad

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THE WEST WIND

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Amy Benham saves her lover's life
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The West Wind

A Story of Red Men and White in Old Wyoming

By CYRUS TOWNSEND BRADY

Author of "As the Sparks Fly Upward," "The Better Man," "Hearts and the Highway," "The Island of Regeneration," Etc.

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By MAYNARD DIXON

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UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

TO

MY FRIEND AND KINSMAN

COLONEL ELI D. HOYLE,

COMMANDING THE SIXTH FIELD ARTILLERY
UNITED STATES ARMY

M18197

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

THE WEST WIND

CHAPTER I

THE HALF BREED

ALMOST before the sharp report of the heavy rifle reached her ears, the girl saw the old man, who had been sitting so quietly by her side, lovingly holding her hand and talking so sweetly to her, stop short in the middle of a word and leap to his feet as if impelled upward by some dynamic force. Appalled by the terrific suddenness of his movement, she saw him waver in the air a moment, as if the force had been as instantaneously withdrawn as it had been applied, and then plunge helplessly downward on his face in the grass at her feet. And there he laid very still and quiet indeed.

Being a Western woman, and having lived most of her life among men to whom "On Guard" was the necessary watchword, her first

instinctive motion as he fell was to snatch the rifle that had lain convenient to the man's hand on the bench on which they had been sitting. Realizing instantly and instinctively perhaps that the man at her feet was already dead, and with equal instinct suspecting further danger to herself, she turned around, weapon in hand, and faced the cañon upon the lip of which the ranch house had been builded. She was alive to the necessity of defense. Time to indulge her grief would come later.

She saw nothing. She heard nothing. The silence was profound. A light breeze stirred the pines on the high uplands but there was not a sign of human presence save in a faint, diaphanous and rapidly vanishing blur of grayish smoke against the blue sky, overhanging the depth of the cañon. And none but a practiced eye would have noticed that. If the shot had come from the incorporeal air and from a phantom weapon it could scarcely have left less evidence of its source.

Staring in fruitless unease and disquiet for a moment, tenderer emotions supervened. The woman leaned the rifle against the bench—a per-

son unused to firearms would have dropped it —and turned to look at the inert figure on the grass which had not moved since that convulsive upward leap followed by that wild headlong pitch forward and downward.

What she saw as she stooped over him was sufficiently horrible. The bullet of a large caliber weapon, evidently fired at close range, had torn out the whole back of the old man's skull. His white hair was dabbled and gory. Sick with horror, shuddering with grief, shrinking away, yet resolute, the young woman bent down to him and turned him over. The front view was if anything worse than the other. The bullet had been nicked with diabolic malignity and had mushroomed. What a moment before had been a handsome, splendid old man, was now a thing inexpressible. It cannot be described, much less dwelt upon.

Then her iron self-control gave away. She buried her face in her hands, long shudders shaking her slender figure as a reed is shaken by the wind. She sank to her knees by the side of the body and could not rise for a space. She thought she would have fainted. Indeed, most

certainly she would have done so if she had been bred elsewhere than in the West, or had there been any one near her to relieve her of responsibility. She did not weep. The grief in her overwrought heart was too deep for the relief of tears. Perhaps she prayed. She could not tell afterwards. Perhaps she only knelt there in a voiceless agony of sorrow and despair.

At any rate, she presently realized, after how long or short a time she could not tell, that the situation called for immediate action. She covered the face of the man with her handkerchief, although what it cost her to do so can scarcely be imagined, and rose to her feet, unsteady, yet determined.

She had scarcely attained the upright position when she heard a soft swish through the air. She was conscious of something long, sinuous, tremulous flashing before her eyes. Another second and a slender rope whirled over her head and slipped down over her shoulders. There was a sudden sharp constriction about her elbows. The loop was drawn close on the instant.

The situation was novel, but she realized at once what had happened. Some one had thrown

a lariat and she was fast bound and helpless. Making a futile motion toward the Winchester, and realizing on the instant how impossible it would be to seize it with the pressure already on the taut rope, she turned about, to confront a man.

He was a handsome, devil-may-care individual of medium height, whose well-knit and muscular figure gave promise of a strength which might almost have been deemed incompatible with his lithe body and graceful alertness of movement. For the rest and to particularize, his complexion was reddish brown, his eyes were brightly black, his hair was long and slightly curly on his shoulders. He wore the ordinary dress of the cow-puncher, but there was a touch or two of added brightness in his apparel. A ribbon here and a jewel there, overelaboration of stitching and embroidery on boots and belt and hat-band that was quite foreign to the pure American breed.

Clasping the lariat firmly in his right hand, and keeping tight strain upon it lest by some frantic movement she might work herself free, with his left he took off his big Stetson hat, and

bowed low before her. He smiled as he did so, flashing his white teeth in the sunlight with all the nonchalance in the world, apparently quite oblivious of the fact that he had just been guilty of the murder of her father, his aged friend and benefactor, who had also been his employer, and was now about to add to that heinous crime the abduction of a woman.

She stared at him a moment, speechless between surprise and aversion.

"So it was you who killed him! You!" she whispered at last, as if scarcely able to comprehend the obvious fact.

He nodded as gracefully as before. Evidently he felt rather proud of his murderous exploit.

"Why?"

"Because he stood in my way."

"Your way? Where?"

"To you, Mademoiselle," he replied concisely.

In his accent no less than by his manner he betrayed the fact that the blood of some old *Coureur de Bois* ran in his veins and accounted for the curling wave in his black hair.

"To me!" exclaimed the woman, revulsion showing in her face and voice.

"To you," said the man harshly, dropping, as a cloak is cast aside, his glamour of chivalry and gallantry, and speaking now with the fierce blood of his Indian forbears. "I want you for my"—he paused a second—"squaw!" he added with deliberate malice.

He would fain make her pay for something he had suffered at her hand in days past.

"I would rather die a thousand deaths!" was the hot return. The contempt and the admiration in his tone and words alike infuriated her. "I had rather be with him yonder!" she added in bitter scorn.

"Pardon," broke in the Half Breed nonchalantly, smiling again, "but the alternative is not between death and life."

"What then?" cried the girl.

"Between being my wife, or—"

"You! you!" she choked out, seemingly unable to find words to voice her aversion and contempt, emotions which for the time being completely deprived her of any fear of him.

As she spoke she ran toward him, to what pur-

pose she could hardly have told in her passionate resentment and indignation. This, indeed, was just what he wanted, for with a sudden deft movement of his hand, he flung the now loosened rope around her feet, catching them together and encircling them tighter with a quick jerk, the swiftness of which, although he strove to prevent it, to do him justice, nearly threw her off her balance. She was now bound hand and foot and more helpless than before. She even kept her feet with difficulty. The consciousness of that was bad enough, but to see the man laugh was worse. He was actually enjoying her predicament and her rage filled him with pleasure. He approached her now, caught her by the waist and shoulders, her whole soul revolting from his touch, and laid her gently enough down on the grass. To struggle was impossible. She had to submit. He stooped over her a moment to make the knots secure. The indignity of her position for a moment drove every other thought out of her heart.

"If I ever get my hand loose," she said at last, straightening convulsively at his touch, "God help you!"

The threat did not appear to alarm him unduly.

"I 'll take care of that, Mademoiselle," he answered composedly; "meanwhile you must go with me."

"Where?"

"Where I please."

"Why?"

"I have told you. At least, my actions must have told you," he went on, with certainly no appropriate idea of what his real actions expressed, "that I love you; that I mean to have you. I sought to pay court to you honorably through him yonder, and he threatened to kick me off the place. And when I told you—well, I shall not soon forget your look or your answer." He laughed once more. "You may look but at least you will not answer me like that again. As for him, the man does not hold his life at a very high rate who threatens me. He won't kick anybody off the place now."

"There are others who will," said the woman with spirit undaunted; she would not permit him the luxury of suspecting that he frightened her by his sinister words. "And it would be better

for you had you never been born if you harm a hair of my head."

"You mean Sullivan?"

The woman nodded.

"Perhaps Kennard?"

Again the sigh of affirmation.

"Burly Irish pig and tin pot soldier," he sneered; "I can take care of them both."

"You will have a chance to try."

He shrugged his shoulders as if the matter were of absolute and entire indifference to him.

"Meanwhile," he said, "we must get away to some spot where I can woo you and win your love undisturbed."

Again she raged against that mixture of passion and mockery.

"And do you think that such a woman as I, even if you were of my people, and possessed all the qualities that you lack, could do anything but loathe you when you come red-handed into my presence?"

"We shall see. Meanwhile we must get away."

He whistled softly as he spoke and a bronco came trotting around the corner of the house,

nickering slightly, and stooped to his hand. Throwing the reins over a peg in the log wall of the ranch house near by and leaving the woman alone upon the grass, the man, who seemed entirely familiar with the place, turned and ran swiftly toward the corral where were kept the private saddle horses. Selecting her own mount he caught it easily and haltered it. Disdaining her own saddle, he took another from the storehouse, a man's saddle, and clapped it on her pony's back. Then he led the horse back to the pair he had left.

The girl had managed to writhe and struggle along the grass until her head was laid on the feet of the dead man she had so loved.

"Ah, very pretty," he sneered, staring into her stony face. "Now I am about to mount you on the horse, your own, you see. Will you go without a struggle if I unbind your feet?"

"I promise nothing," she answered.

He shrugged his shoulders, smiled again.

"Oh, very well," he said; "I must get along without your parole then. It does n't matter much after all."

Seeing that her arms were still securely bound,

the man knelt and unloosened the rope about her ankles. Then he lifted her lightly to her feet. The instant she could do so, she kicked out at him savagely. And he only avoided her by a quick backward leap. She was young, vigorous and strong, but the odds were too heavy against her. The Half Breed clasped his arms about her in spite of her efforts and held her with an iron grip. The contact with him was so loathsome to her that she almost instantly ceased to struggle, wherefore he at once released her.

"That is better," he said, panting and flushed with his exertions. "Now, will you get on that horse like a human being, or shall I tie you across the saddle like a slaughtered bear?"

"I shall do nothing," answered the woman.

She had looked lovely before, but in her dishevelment and disarray she looked even more beautiful, thought the man. He ran to her swiftly and seized her in his arms. Her cheek was very near his lips. He did not offer to kiss her. A thought struck him. It would be difficult to get her in the saddle, if she struggled, without hurting her, and he did not wish to harm her yet. He would try strategy.

"You see," he said, holding her tight, "how helpless you are. If you do not instantly mount that horse, or allow me to place you in the saddle, I will—"

"What?"

"Kiss you into submission," he laughed, quite delighted with his own invention.

Her blood turned cold at the mere thought.

"Put me up," she said faintly, instantly choosing the least dreadful alternative.

"That masters you, does it?" he sneered. "You see, of course, that I could take all the kisses I want. You note my magnanimity and kindness in leaving you free."

"Free!" exclaimed the girl, looking at her bonds.

"In one sense, yes, in another, no. I want to win your kisses. I want them to be given to me. I will not steal them. There will be no need when you know me better."

"Let us go," said the woman, to whom the conversation was becoming unendurable.

"Ah, I thought you would see it," he cried, perversely misunderstanding her.

As he spoke he seized her once more, and by

a great effort lifted her into the saddle. With a strange quality of delicacy, which was as unexpected as it was amazing to her, he carefully arranged her skirts about her as well as he could before he slipped her little feet into the shortened stirrups. Then he coolly tied them together under the horse's belly with a loose rope.

"You see I am not quite sure of you yet," he said. "Are you quite comfortable?"

"Comfortable!" was the bitter ejaculation, which he again deliberately misunderstood.

"Ah, then we will move on."

He sprang lightly into his own saddle, and taking the long rope attached to the hackamore of the otherwise unbridled animal which she bestrode, he started off.

The woman, bound, fettered, helpless, turned and gave one long glance back at the figure lying so still on the grass. Then and not till then did the tears well to her eyes, but she bit her lip resolutely and held them unshed. She would not allow this man who had murdered her father, and who was stealing her away, to see any evidence whatever of so-called woman's weakness in her.

CHAPTER II

IN THE RAPIDS

AS the girl and her captor turned the corner of the house the whole landscape rose before them. The rancher had planted his stakes on the edge of a deep and narrow cañon, on the shoulders of the Big Horn Range. Below, the country fell far away. The trees disappeared. The terrain developed into a rich and grassy upland. Far down the valley her father's herds were pastured. There, at work on some of the multiple duties of the cattleman's hard, prosaic life, were Sullivan, the big, splendid foreman, and the other boys of the ranch. Even the Chinese cook, who usually was about the house, had gone away that morning, and she and her father had been alone. The Half Breed had chosen his time with diabolic cunning.

Beyond the valley rose another range, a lower one, shutting it in on the farther side. A score of miles away was Fort McCullough, where

were quartered Captain Kennard and his troop. How those men would have rushed to her rescue had they known! How they would ride after her when they got the news! They would overtake her, no fear of that. The universe itself would not be big enough to hide the Half Breed and herself from the pursuit of Sullivan and Kennard. One or both of them, they would find her; but it might be, she thought with a shudder, too late. If it came to that they would find her dead.

She thought, almost with a sort of awe, of the unbounded temerity of the man who rode so jauntily by her side with so careless and indifferent an air. What could he be dreaming of? How could he dare? What madness possessed him to invoke upon himself the wrath of the immortal gods when such instruments of vengeance as Kennard and Sullivan were at hand. Throughout the wide world they would hunt him down. Go where he would, do what he might, his doom sentence was written, his end was certain.

She had no idea of where she was to be taken, of course, although she guessed that it would be

somewhere in the unexplored cañons of the great mountain range. She observed that their immediate way led along the brink of their own cañon and she marked with some surprise that they turned to the right, the northward, and presently descended to the level of the stream by one of the transverse ravines which connected the rest of the depression with the upper plateau.

Now for all his habitual insouciance, his congenital recklessness and disregard for consequences, which was temperamental, the Half Breed realized keenly enough that for such actions as the murder of the rancher and the abduction of his daughter, he would be relentlessly pursued by the keenest of trailers, their efforts stimulated by love and hatred. Therefore, he proposed to take every precaution possible to him to baffle them, to throw them off the trail and to make his escape with his lovely quarry the more certain. His present movements, therefore, like the murder, were by no means the result of chance but had all been most cunningly planned.

The stream flowing into the cañon widened where they had arrived, and for many miles it

was practicable for a canoe, provided its paddler were sufficiently expert and sufficiently daring to attempt the descent of the river. The current flowed swiftly, however, and there were some frightful rapids far below, through which nobody had ever passed.

On the bank the two horses halted. The Half Breed untied her feet, lifted the woman to the ground, tied her again and laid her in a half-recumbent position against some of the bowlders adjacent. Then he unsaddled both the horses, stepped around a projecting buttress, and drew forth a bark canoe. Fastening it to the shore, he deposited the saddles and other things he had brought with him in it. Then taking the halters of the horses in his hand, he led them across the river, here quiet and shallow, and disappeared with them up a smaller cañon on the other side.

The woman thought at once that he intended to turn the horses loose and then trust himself and her to the canoe, but she did not quite divine the extent of his purpose. He had a better scheme than that. He was gone a long time, it seemed to her, during which she prayed that the

meanest and poorest of her father's men might by some happy chance come upon the scene, but nothing happened. The silence and solitude were unbroken and undisturbed save by the ripple of the waters of the river.

At last the Half Breed reappeared without the horses, more quiet perhaps but as insouciant in his bearing as ever. He picked her up gently enough and deposited her in the canoe.

"I might untie you," he began tentatively.

"And I should tear the canoe to pieces with my own hands," she interposed swiftly.

"Exactly, therefore you must remain bound."

He cast off the lashing that had secured the canoe to the shore, stepped in it, seized the paddle and shot out where the force of the current took the boat down the stream. There was little more for him to do after that than was required by deft steerage to keep the frail vessel from the rocks in the river. He sought to enliven the journey by making conversation, to which she deigned no reply. She lay forward looking aft; he knelt aft, looking forward, and wielded the paddle. Finding her obdurate in her silence he broke into little snatches of song. Becoming

bolder as the rapid current bore them further from the ranch, he sang louder and more lightly.

For some hours they ran rapidly down the cañon, passing through several rather rough rapids, with no further mishap than a wetting. When the sun above indicated noon he beached the canoe and opened his saddlebags, producing food and drink. Leaving the woman still in the boat, he knelt down on the sand by her side and fed her like a baby.

Her first instinct had been to refuse to eat or drink. She had locked her teeth together at the first thought of such a thing, but wiser counsel prevailed. She realized that if she allowed herself to grow weak and faint through lack of food, she would be more completely in his power than ever, and although it was poison to her, and from a blood-stained hand, she forced herself to partake of what he gave her. She showed her quality, her rare mettle, in that.

"So," said he at last, as she finished what he gave her, "you eat out of my hand already like a child or a dog. It's the proper attitude for my wife that is to be."

To this she vouchsafed no answer. The Half

Breed did n't seem to expect any, for when he thought she had enough, he rose and looked down the river. The rapids before them were the worst in the whole of the long wild course of the mountain stream. They were filled with rocks, the downward plunge was tremendous, the channel, if any existed, was narrowed in by the towering walls which here closely approached each other. There was no way around these rapids, no ascent to the top of the walls. One could only go back or go on. To attempt the passage seemed almost certain death. Even a man as skillful, as self-reliant, and as indifferent apparently to danger as the Half Breed, could not face it without thoughtful apprehension.

"Mademoiselle," he said at last, "I am about to take you through those rapids."

"I am glad," was the answer.

"And why?"

"It is almost certain death. No one has ever gone through them. Few have even attempted it. That 's why I am glad you are going to try."

"Aye, we may die," he continued.

"I had rather die than live with you."

"But at least," he went on sweetly, "we shall die together."

To this she made no reply.

"Now, I am not a cruel man," he said; "what I have done has been for love of you and to avenge my honor."

"Your honor!" sneered the girl.

"And I am willing to give you a chance for your life," he went on, disregarding her biting words. "It is a slim one, I grant you, but as I know you can swim I will unbind your hands and feet, and then if we go over or smash the canoe on one of the rocks—why, your chance will be as good as mine. But before I do that you must promise me that you will sit quiet in the canoe and make no movement whatever, for the slightest motion on your part will capsize it. Will you give me your word to do that?"

"No," answered the woman, hotly.

"Why, you are a fool," retorted the nettled man, his composure visibly disturbed. "If you really want to capsize the canoe, why don't you say that you would do nothing and then do what you please?"

"When I give my word I keep it," answered

the girl, "and I give you my word now freely that I will die before you shall harm me."

"Well, we can't discuss that now," said the Half Breed grimly, "and if you won't promise to do what I ask, you must lie as you are and take your chance."

He looked at her thoughtfully a moment and then with some of the saddle gear and other things he wedged her tight where she lay, so she could make no motion of any kind. He even drew her further down in the bottom of the canoe, closer to himself, to give the little vessel greater stability by this human ballast, as it were. Then he shoved the boat off the sand, climbed into the stern, seized the paddle and in a moment they were in the rapids.

The canoe, caught by the full force of the current, shot forth like an arrow released from its bow, but no arrow ever rocked or swayed so fearfully as did that boat. It rose and fell with the tremendous current that heaved up the water in huge masses that might have been likened to waves of the sea, except that no wave was ever so confused in its motion as were those towering on either side of the frail walls of birch, or toss-

ing it about like a leaf before some wanton wind. Spray flew over the canoe like sheets of rain.

The woman lay on her back staring up at the thin strip of blue beyond the cañon walls, or at the frightful precipices on either side, or glancing at the form of the Half Breed bending forward, wielding his paddle with iron strength and skill and with a nice adjustment of balance, his hair blown back by the fierce wind of their wild downward rush as they leaped through the mouth of the cañon.

Loathing him, hating him as she did, there was a certain amount of thrilling admiration extorted by his skill and courage. Such management was magnificent. He was doing the impossible. A touch here, a movement there, all that could be done; yet it kept them afloat and alive.

They were in the thick of it now; yet, save for the spray, the canoe had shipped little water. Not a wave had yet broken upon them. They were not to be so fortunate hereafter. One mighty wave curled up before them. By bending her head backward the woman could see it. They rose to meet it but not swiftly enough.

With a crash like thunder it broke and fell, a vast liquid mountain, smiting her on the chest like a trip-hammer. She had only time to realize that they were now in the very vortex of the flood, the gateway as it were of the monutain pass, when consciousness left her.

The canoe, half filled with water, still floated. The blow of the great wave had, however, wrenched the paddle from the Half Breed's hand. The boat was no longer under control. It swerved wildly, crashing against a rock. There was a ripping, tearing sound. The canoe hung poised for a moment and then the force of the current hurled it crossways toward the other shore. The speed with which it was flung from side to side alone kept it from sinking. It was like a ball thrown by gigantic hands.

Half blinded and half drowned, the man realized instantly what had happened. He had followed the course of the river oftentimes on the shore far above. He knew that they had passed the danger point, and traveling at the pace they did would shortly be in comparatively still waters. So soon as the motion of the canoe was checked, however, it would sink.

Dashing the water from his eyes, he stared eagerly over to the nearer shore. If he had had his paddle he could have made it. He could easily make it alone as it was. Should he try it?

He looked at the senseless form of the woman, for whom he had dared so much, and resolved that he would save her—for himself! He leaned over, seized her by the lashing that bound her feet, rolled out of the canoe, dragging her with him, and started swimming for the shore.

The inert heavy mass of the woman was a terrible handicap in that still tremendous current. If she had been conscious, however, and had struggled with him, or clasped him around the neck it would have been worse. Again and again in his fierce battle with the waves as he was swung about hither and thither, he was on the point of letting her go. Again and again he resisted the temptation, until by and by, after a struggle that left him speechless, gasping and broken, his feet touched the sand. He staggered onward a few paces, drew her up by his side and fell prostrate.

By some freak of fortune the ripped and torn

canoe was cast ashore near them, its contents water soaked but otherwise intact. To this, however, the Half Breed was oblivious. He lay panting, striving to recover his breath, until a tall form stepping between him and the sun caused a shadow to fall across his face. He opened his eyes and stared up into the stern, grim face of an Indian; tall, stately, magnificent, painted for battle, his black hair crowned with the great war bonnet of the Sioux.

CHAPTER III

THE RANCHMAN, THE GIRL AND THE SOLDIER

BIG Patrick Sullivan had no premonition as to what awaited him at the ranch house as he leisurely rode upward to the top of the hill about ten o'clock that bright summer morning.

His name stamped him as Irish, his disposition, bearing and temper, especially the last, were undoubtedly Celtic. And his facial appearance, his dark hair, fair skin and brilliant blue eyes could only have come from the Emerald Isle. But his Irish heritage was one of the distant past. It showed the persistency of his racial stock, by the way. For well nigh two hundred years his people had been denizens of Pennsylvania and the further West. The family had been a useful one to the United States. Its sons had filled positions of prominence in their day, in the army and navy in the several wars of the country, being all of them natural fight-

ers, of course, and one of them had even risen to be a member of Congress from his native state, when it meant much more to be a member of that exalted body than it does now.

There had been a roving strain through them all, however, which had broken the trammels of convention at intervals, and had sent the particular scion of the house in whose veins the strain ran most swiftly, careering all over the world on all sorts of quests, aimless or otherwise, but always out-of-the-way. This vagrom disposition had brought Patrick, or "Big Pat," as he was called by every cowboy under him, to the ranch in the foothills of the Big Horn Range. There a power stronger even than the wanderlust had constrained him to plant his stakes permanently on the spot in which he is now to be found.

Sullivan was a man of herculean strength and gigantic build. He could ride anything that was big enough for him to ride and that could carry him. He got along with the cows, who have to be handled like children, just as he would have got along with children themselves if Providence had brought him in contact with

any. Indeed, Amy Benham was not more than a child when she first burst upon the astonished vision of Mr. Sullivan; but that is a digression of which more later. He could handle men, too, and bad ones if necessary about as well as good ones. Those rare qualities soon brought him to the notice of his employer, old Colonel Benham, who, with his young daughter, constituted the family that owned the ranch nestling under the shadow of snow-clad Cloud Peak where the sun sank behind it to the westward.

From a common cow-puncher Sullivan gradually climbed to the position of the Colonel's right-hand man. And as foreman and manager he was simply invaluable. Contrary to the usual habit of his race and family, he developed a thrifty turn of mind and through the Colonel's kindness and generosity at last found himself the owner of a comparatively small though still considerable share in the great and prosperous ranch.

Sullivan would have given his share, and indeed the whole ranch with everything pertaining thereto, had he owned it, for the least possible proprietary claim to Amy Benham herself.

It was she who kept him there. She was the force or power which had transformed him—Cymon and Iphigenia, again! They were ardent lovers, these passionate Irishmen. From the first he had been fascinated by her; he had vowed and declared himself her bond slave. For her he gave up his hours of play with the men. He taught her to ride, to shoot, to hunt, to fish, to swim, and throw the lariat. He even imparted to her—strange knowledge for a woman—what he knew about the habits of the cattle upon the thousand hills which belonged to him and her father jointly. Unusual upbringing for a young girl!

The fate of the growing girl might have been sad indeed had that been her only education. Women there were none other on the ranch. Because he had suddenly lost the wife he adored, Colonel Benham had buried himself and his daughter in that out-of-the-way country. Because he had New England thrift in his blood he had turned that self-burial to good account by engaging in cattle raising, when such a business was as full of possibilities of success as any undertaking in the West.

The Colonel had himself superintended the early education of his daughter in arts and letters, and the refinements—the humanities of life—but he had been too well brought up himself not to understand the necessity for other companionship for her. So at suitable age he had sent the young hoyden to a famous school on the banks of the Hudson River. The girls, with whom she was thrown in contact, vastly impressed by the variety and multiplicity of her accomplishments in fields which they had not dreamed the sex could enter, had christened her, half in derision, half in affection, "The West Wind," and "The West Wind" she had remained; even on the ranch, when the news of so apposite a title blew that way, as it soon did in her own letters to her father.

The Colonel, Big Sullivan, Wing Loo, the faithful Chinese cook, and in fact every cowpuncher on the ranch, every horse which might be considered gentle enough to submit to a woman's touch, lived for the yearly return to her home of the daughter of the house. Gala days indeed were those of summer when she and all the men on the ranch enjoyed her vacation together.

Sullivan, whose affection at the beginning had been half paternal, found himself at last as she blossomed into young womanhood, wholly in love with her. At the same time he realized that the girl was growing farther from him with every passing hour, with every added bit of experience, with every font of knowledge of which she drank, with every new association in the larger world. As a child she had looked up to him. He had been the very ideal of her little girlhood. Now it was different.

She liked him almost more than any one else even now, in a way she even loved him, but not in the way he would have desired. There was no reason, so far as he was concerned, that he could see why she should not love him in that way. They were not lacking in assurance and self-confidence, these Sullivans. He was good to look at, at least women had told him so often enough before for him to believe it, and scarcely more than a dozen years older than she. Some day he would be a very rich man if the cattle business did not utterly go to pieces. On the score of education, he was, of course, sadly deficient. But education, book learning as they

phrased it, did not count for so very much in the West in those days.

There were therefore plenty of reasons why she might have loved him; only one why she did not, if reason may be sought for so strange and ungovernable a thing as a woman's inclinations and affections. That cause was not inanimate; it had gender and personality set off very charmingly by the blue uniform of the United States. In a word, it was another man.

Captain Joseph B. Kennard had not been a cadet at West Point when Amy Benham had been a student across the river. He had been instructor in the department of Cavalry, having been ordered East from his regiment to recuperate from several years of hard campaigning in which he had succeeded in getting three things a soldier prized above all other things: an early promotion, a wound in action and a medal of honor for gallant conduct. He had more quickly than usual risen to command his troop, and was still young enough to be an ideal lover—dashing, gallant, scarred, distinguished!

He had made her acquaintance at her father's instance. He was the son of an old Civil War

comrade of Colonel Benham's, and in compliance with a letter from the father, he had made haste to call upon the young girl, so soon as she had been domiciled in the school over the river. With her father's permission, and the sanction of the school authorities of course, who were impressed with his rank rather than his youth, he had taken her across the river many times to one brilliant function or another at the Point. As he came to know her he had been charmed with the girl's splendid beauty, her frankness, her generally free and independent spirit, her girlish, graceful carriage, her keen bright mind, trained in the stimulating school of Nature—he thought she was well named "The West Wind!" —and almost from the first moment he saw her he had loved her.

Ninety-nine girls out of a hundred would have succumbed to the fascinations of the gray-coated cadets who swarmed about her in scores so soon as they had the opportunity. Amy Benham was of the one in a hundred class of girls. She had been at first immensely flattered by the attentions of this distinguished soldier whose record she very speedily learned, and then there

had been a congeniality between the two through their common knowledge of, and their common love for the great West, in which his regiment had been stationed practically continuously since his graduation.

On account of his age and rank, and the sanction of her father, great liberties and privileges were allowed him. He brought horses across the river, and when occasion served they took long rides together. He became more and more in love every minute, and she at last awakened to the fact that her feelings matched his own.

He had thought it proper at that time not to make any formal avowal of his affections. It seemed to him like taking undue advantage of youth and inexperience. He had kept tight rein over himself, therefore, and he fondly imagined that she was ignorant of his passion. The two years which she had required for the completion of the studies she had elected to pursue would soon be over. Upon her graduation he would declare himself, and at once seek the permission of her father to make her his wife. He knew that the girl was a great heiress, but that

did not especially trouble him, for in addition to his pay, he was possessed of a small but sufficient fortune of his own. And he was too sensible to let any foolish consideration of that kind stand in the way of their mutual happiness if she loved him.

Fate, however, took things in her own hand. Fate has a habit of doing that—else she would not be Fate! Two months before Amy Benham's graduation, which was to take place early in June, he was ordered to his regiment. The Colonel with the Headquarters and four troops were to be stationed at Fort McCullough. His was one of the four in the Headquarter battalion.

He would have welcomed the order if it had come two months later, because of all the military posts in the United States that was the nearest to where she lived. Now it was a matter of temporary regret at least, for that program which had depended upon her graduation would have to be abandoned and another decided upon later.

He could have spoken before he bade her good-by, but he was a man of fixed and stubborn

determination, and he declined to do so. He would keep to his original resolution. The farewells between them, therefore, were no more than might have been expected between two very good friends. Amy Benham experienced a feeling of disappointment at this restraint, but there was nothing she could do, and in a spirit of pride she strove to put the matter out of her mind. Yet, during the long journey across the continent after her graduation, the fact that she would soon see him was more impressed upon her heart and higher in her thoughts than that at the end of the ride she would be clasped in the arms of her father—"Thus it is our daughters leave us!"

Sullivan, as he invariably did, met her at the station. Her father, he said, had been ailing somewhat and he himself had come down with but one faithful follower to fetch her. He had brought with him a light spring wagon and a couple of the best saddle horses beside, so that she could ride or drive at her pleasure during the long journey of something over one hundred and fifty miles which separated her from the ranch to the northward.

She was always happy when she left the stuffy Pullman and got out on the broad prairies, with her favorite horse beneath her. She was happier this time than ever. For her school days were over and she was coming back to enter upon the serious business of life, so far as love, or even life itself, could be considered serious to nineteen years. And that serious business was simply her coming to the man she adored and who adored her as well. She was so gay and so care-free that Sullivan, who knew little or nothing about Kennard, was on the point of declaring himself. They were a very hopeful, optimistic, confident race, these Sullivans. Some modesty, or timidity, however, not natural surely, but recently acquired in her joyous, buoyant, commanding presence restrained him, luckily for him.

It was strange also that Sullivan had no suspicions of Kennard. The big ranchman had often met the officers of the Post, who were fond of riding over to the ranch, sometimes with their wives and children. They were always welcome there, although it was understood that Colonel Benham, who had aged surprisingly in the

last few years, returned no visits. Sullivan did not care much for women if they were married, and he had some of the Irishman's contempt for the government and a great deal of the free and easy rancher's scorn of the disciplined soldier. He generally made himself scarce when there were guests at the ranch, which was foolish from one point of view, for if he had wanted to know the situation he should have put himself in the way of obtaining the information. However, his blissful ignorance saved him many a heart pang which was just as well in the end.

After a long ride of several days and several stops for the night at hospitable ranch houses, they reached their own ranch late in the evening. In the joy of seeing her beloved father, for the moment the girl actually forgot the younger man. The evening she spent with her father alone she would look back upon gratefully in after years as one of the happiest in her life. For that night, at least, age not youth would be served, and she put out of her head until she was alone in her chamber everything but her good old father.

The work of the ranch had to go on whatever

happened, and Sullivan had taken his men and ridden down into the valley before daybreak. He had an all-day job for the outfit, and he left instructions for Wing Loo, the cook, to prepare something to eat for them and bring it down in the chuck wagon about eight o'clock. It was this unusual absence of both the Chinaman and the other man who ordinarily remained about the place to attend to whatever duties might arise, that had given the Half Breed the opportunity of which he had made so terrible a use that morning.

CHAPTER IV

THE TRAILERS

SULLIVAN came up the hill whistling like a boy in the joy of his heart. The beautiful late spring morning, the air still cool and fresh at the high level at which the range was located, the bright sunshine, the delightful odor of the pines on the ridges, and the thought of the girl he loved and whom he had begun to dream that he might sometime marry, filled his soul with satisfaction. Yet when through the avenue of pines he turned into the gate that marked the home enclosure, he felt that there was an unwonted silence about the huge, rambling log cabin of many rooms which Colonel Benham had built, and to which he had added as occasion needed, which chilled his gayety and filled him with vague alarm.

Usually the old Colonel could be found seated on the low porch or perhaps on one of the benches under the pines, smoking or reading, or

when his daughter was at home as to-day, chatting with her. But no one was visible to the uneasy newcomer. Certainly the day was too fair and sweet to keep any one indoors and Amy should have been outside as well as he. Sullivan swept the ranch house with eager glance, but he saw and heard nothing. He dismounted hurriedly and stepped toward the house, in spite of himself the feeling of apprehension, not to say alarm, growing in his breast as he quickened his pace.

As he mounted the two or three steps to the broad porch, he caught sight of something that made him start with surprised alarm. It was a broad red smear across the clean, well-scrubbed floor. It formed a well-defined trail leading from the end of the porch where beneath the trees beyond the house was the bench which was most affected by the old man, into the dark and silent doorway.

Sullivan bent down and examined it. It was blood, a trail of blood, not dropped from a wound, but caused by dragging some bleeding object. These things he comprehended in an instant. He rose to his feet, crying:

"Miss Amy, for God's sake, where are you? What has happened?"

He did n't stop with that, for as he spoke he fairly leaped toward the door of the house. As he entered the big living room, he almost fell over a body. One glance told him who it was.

"Good God!" he exclaimed, bending over it.

He had feared at first that it was the woman he loved; although his heart was riven at the death of his old friend and employer, there was relief in the knowledge that it was not she.

The Colonel's body was lying on its back. Sullivan had seen gunshot wounds enough to know from a single glance that he had been hit in the back of the head with a bullet that had mushroomed as it penetrated and had torn out his face at its exit. The same glance showed him that the Colonel was past all help or consideration. The same second brought Amy again into his head. The girl—where was she? Why had this murder been done? Who had done it?

"Miss Amy," he called, "where are you?"

A door at the other end of the room was slowly and cautiously opened and a yellow-faced in-

dividual dressed in Chinese garments stuck his head timorously through the opening. In a stride the American had him by the arm, shaking him as the wind shakes a leaf.

"Who did this?" cried Sullivan. "Where 's Miss Amy?"

"Me no sabe, me come back flind Colonel allee samee dead. Me dlagged him here. Me flaid."

"But the girl, where is she?"

"Colonel allee samee 'lonee," answered Wing Loo, rolling his eyes frightfully.

Sullivan clapped his hands to his head to think but could make nothing of the situation then.

"Here," he said at last, despairing of getting anything out of the Chinaman, who was evidently frightened to death.

He stooped over the dead man, took him by the shoulders, and with the Chinaman's aid, together they lifted him and carried him across the hall and laid him on his bed in an adjoining room, covering him with a sheet.

"Now," said Sullivan, whose head was throbbing almost to bursting, "show me where you found him."

Without a word the Chinaman went out the

door, crossed the porch, and pointed to the spot in front of the bench.

Sullivan was not without some ability in the lore of the trail. He got down on his knees and scrutinized the ground in front of the bench. When the Colonel had been struck from behind, he had risen and dug his heels into the loam of the path. The grass at the distance of six feet from the heel marks was crushed and bloody. It was evident what had happened.

"He has been shot in the back of the head. What an end for a brave man," he muttered.

Wing Loo nodded his head.

"Where did you leave Miss Amy? Where was she when you drove off for the field?"

"Allee samee on blench by father," answered Wing Loo, pointing.

"She has n't been shot, that is clear," continued Sullivan, scanning the ground. "Who could have done it? And what has happened to her?"

"Colonel he say last week to Half Bleed man he kick him off place allee samee he tlied make Missy he squaw. Me heard tlalk thlu windlow there."

"Girot! That Half Breed hound!" cried Sullivan. "Could he have done it?"

Followed by the Chinaman he ran around to the right toward the back of the house which was built, as to one side at least, on the very verge of the cañon. Sure enough, from a convenient branch there hung a long knotted rope dangling down to the bottom of the stream.

"He roped that branch," exclaimed Sullivan to the other, "climbed up, shot the Colonel and then made off, but what has he done with the girl? Taken her off with him, damn him!"

In a growing, burning fever of anxiety and impatience he went back to the house for further inspection. On the side opposite that where the Colonel had been shot, he found traces of horses. Also evidence on the grass where a woman had fallen, which would scarcely have been apparent to a less practiced eye.

"He roped her here, curse him," he cried passionately, "and then threw her down—"

At this moment his eye fell upon another form riding up the far-off slope of the foothill toward the ranch house. He was a keen-sighted man and he recognized him at once as old Bud

Meekins. Meekins, half hunter, half prospector, was a veteran frontiersman who made himself generally useful and agreeable to the sundry scattered inhabitants of the territory, and was heartily welcome everywhere. Chance or Providence had brought him there that day most opportunely. He was the best trailer in Wyoming and Sullivan would have instant need of him.

"Hi, Bud," he called, waving his hat, "come here quick, for God's sake!"

There was that in the cattleman's voice that appraised the wanderer that something serious had happened. He put the spurs to his bronco and in a few minutes was standing by the ranchman's side.

"What 's up?"

"There 's hell to pay," was the terse answer. "Colonel Benham has been murdered, I think, by that damned Half Breed, Girot, and Miss Amy is gone."

He choked a little over the name.

"Why I did n't know she was back from school."

"She came last night."

"What makes you suspect the Half Breed?"

"Wing Loo heard the Colonel threaten to kick him off the place if he made any attempt to pay any attention to the girl. The Colonel was sitting on the other side of the house, and he came up the cañon back of the house, threw his lariat over a tree and climbed up and shot the old man in the back, and then he took the girl away. Look here, what do you make of that?"

He pointed to the grass and to the marks of the horses' hoofs.

"He 's made a trail that we can follow 'til doomsday if it don't rain," answered the hunter, looking down and inspecting it closely. "What hosses is missin'?"

"I don't know; I just got here," answered Sullivan.

"Well, the sooner we can git on his trail the better," Meekins replied.

"I 'll run him down," cried the big cattleman passionately, "if I have to follow him to the end of the world!"

"I 'm with you," answered the old hunter promptly, "but we 're wastin' time. Git some

of the boys up, or I 'll go down and summon them for you."

"No, you stay here and make what you can out of it. I know where the boys are and can get 'em quicker 'n you could. You get some fresh horses ready for us, too."

Sullivan turned as he spoke and leaped on the back of his horse, still comparatively fresh, and the moment after was thundering down the hill. In an incredibly short time, it seemed to the old trapper, he was back with a bunch of wildly excited and infuriated cowboys at his heels. Without orders, they rushed into the corral, each man selecting the best available horse he could come at for the long journey. They saddled up and then swarmed into the bunk house and came back with Winchesters in their hands and Colts at their hips. Meanwhile Wing Loo had prepared immense quantities of bread and meat, which the boys ate voraciously as they worked, or stuffed into their saddlebags for the journey.

"Now, boys," said Meekins, when they were ready to start, "the trail leads straight along the bluff. Where it goes to no one can tell yit."

"That 's what we propose to find out and

pretty tolerable quick," said Johnson, one of the older cowboys.

"We 'll make short work of him if we ketch him," said another.

"God help him!" cried a third.

"God help him if he has harmed that girl. The murder of the old man is bad enough, but —well—I reckon we 'll know how to deal with him when we get him," said Sullivan. "The thing to do is to get him. Now, then, let 's get away. First, two of you will have to stay here at the house, and one of you will have to ride over to the fort and notify Colonel Wainwright of the murder."

He rapidly designated three men for this work. They did not relish being left behind, but Sullivan was a man who was accustomed to be obeyed, and they did not dare to question his commands. The man whose business it was to notify Colonel Wainwright, turned without another word and galloped down the slope.

"Afore we start," said Meekins, "I think it only right to tell you that there 's rumors that the Sioux an' the Cheyennes are out. They 've been restless all spring an' I guess they 're goin' to

take advantage of the pleasant weather to go on the warpath an' raise a little hell an' take a few scalps on their own account. There's no knowin' what we may run into. Although there is only these two pony tracks right about here, I don't reckon the Half Breed went into this thing alone. I got a guess comin' that says he has cast his lot in with his Injin blood kin."

"We don't care who 's on the warpath," said Sullivan. "We want the Half Breed and we 're going to get him if we 've got to ride through the whole Sioux nation. Now, ride on!"

Meekins nodded. With Sullivan at his right and somewhat in his rear, he rode to the head of the score of horsemen and trotted along the bluff. The progress he made was slow because he had to follow a trail not visible to the untrained eye. The advance, however, was steady. By and by they struck the soft ground at the head of the ravine which led to the bottom of the cañon. There was a little muddy ground there caused by a spring, and the trail was plain enough then, even to the greenest tenderfoot.

"They went down there," said Meekins, point-

ing, and as there was no way of getting out of the gulch once in it except by crossing the stream or descending it, he rode rapidly to the bottom.

The others, by his direction, kept back a little, while the hunter examined the ground. His experience made everything plain to him.

"He laid the girl down there still bound," he said, pointing to the exact spot among the rocks while the others stared in wonder and admiration. "Then he took the hosses into the river. I 'll see what he did on the other side."

Without another word he plunged in and soon crossed the stream.

"Yep," he called out to those waiting on the other side, "here are their tracks."

Indeed, footmarks of the two horses were easily seen, but there was something else which was not so apparent. The trailer stooped down and scrutinized the shore at close range. He waved his hand to them and then scrambled up the corresponding ravine to the crest of the cañon, which was lower than the one on the side on which the ranch stood. They saw him stoop down and examine the ground again. Presently he came back and rejoined them.

"Two hosses," he said, "was rid down into that stream, and was rid out on the other side. Them tracks go up to the top of the bluff an' straight away across the prairie."

"Did you see anything of them?"

"Not a sight. But that 's not all; there 's footmarks of a man leadin' back to the river. He tried to disguise 'em by steppin' on rocks, but I seen 'em. He can't fool me."

"What do you make of it, Bud?" asked Sullivan.

"Why, he took them hosses over the river an' started 'em south to fool us an' then he come back here."

"And do you think that he 's hidden about here?"

"I 'd just as soon think of his puttin' his head into a lion's mouth," replied Meekins dryly. "Like most half breeds, he ain't no fool exactly," he went on.

"What then?"

"He must have gone down the river."

"But how?"

"In a canoe, I make my guess. Lemme look again. Yep," he said at last, "he done it there.

About how far do you think he could go in a canoe, Sullivan?" he asked, looking up from the place where he knelt by the water side.

"It is a dozen miles, I take it, down to the White Horse Rapids. He'd have to stop there."

"I don't know about that, Pat," put in old Johnson. "A man that'll shoot the Colonel and run off with the girl ain't likely to stop at no rapids."

"Nobody's ever gone through 'em to my knowledge," said Meekins, "an' lived to tell the tale."

"You'll find the Half Breed tried it."

"And Miss Amy," groaned Sullivan.

Johnson threw up his hands.

"They got through or they didn't," he said concisely.

"Well, we've got to foller 'em an' find out," said Meekins.

"Good!" said Sullivan. "Now, Johnson, you and two men cross the river and follow the trail. Don't come back until you find out where it leads. There's just a chance we're mistaken and they may really have gone that way."

"I 'd better go along with 'em, I reckon," said Meekins; "it's a hard trail to foller."

"Go," said Sullivan; "any fool can go down the river. I 'll take that job myself."

"So long, then," said Johnson, as he summoned two of the men and plunged into the river. "Here 's hoping that some of us 'll git her," he cried, turning in his saddle, half way over.

"Some of us will," growled Sullivan. "Come on, men."

He turned and rode back up to the lip of the cañon, and followed the downward course at a rapid pace, recklessly galloping through the pine forest, cutting off wide sweeps, bends and curves on every hand. He rode in silence with a grim, set face, and the men, as hard a set of riders as ever bestrode horse flesh, were put to it to keep up with him. They had work to do and there was little time or occasion for conversation. Twenty blood hounds on the trail of a fleeing slave could not have followed with more relentless, ferocious tenacity of purpose than these men pursued their quarry.

CHAPTER V

THE ALARM

IT was yet early in the day when Captain Kennard, having finished the hard two-hour regular morning drill of his troop, walked thoughtfully down the parade ground toward the commanding officer's quarters. The work of the morning being thus early disposed of satisfactorily, it was his pleasant purpose to ask leave to spend the remainder of the day at the ranch by the cañon, at which he knew his young beloved had just arrived.

He expected the day to be a momentous one in his career. Now that Amy Benham had returned finally from school it was his purpose to declare forthwith his affection for her and learn if it were reciprocated and in that case formally to ask her father's consent to their speedy marriage.

Kennard was a modest man, as timid with women as he was intrepid with men. He felt

no assurance whatever as to what would be the answer to that question to be put to the woman he loved; and yet as he dwelt upon the sweet and tender memories of their past association, he was not without hope, and as hope begets confidence, he was a happy man that morning. At least, whatever occurred, he would have the glorious privilege of seeing her again and that was much to this earnest young soldier.

The months that had intervened since his departure from West Point for Fort McCullough had been the longest he had ever passed. When she went home from school the first time for the summer vacation, while he stayed at West Point, the parting had been hard enough for him, but now that he loved her so deeply, it had been infinitely worse on this occasion.

The young Captain, therefore, walked with rapid, buoyant steps toward the low rambling wooden building, which was at once the home and the office of Colonel Wainwright, the Commandant of the regiment and the post. He had no doubt but that he would get the desired permission and a few hours would decide his fate.

Fort McCullough was completely enclosed by a high wooden palisade with log blockhouses at each corner and a watch tower; at least the fort proper was so surrounded. There were, of course, outlying buildings and corrals, commissary and quartermaster's departments, but the quarters of the officers and men were all in the stockade. Ground, standing timber, and labor—soldiers' labor, of course—had all been abundant when the frontier post was laid out and built, so the enclosure was of considerable size. In each of the log blockhouses were mounted small cannon. Against Indians, its only possible enemies, it was an impregnable position. The main gate of the wooden wall opened directly on the parade on the side directly opposite to the Colonel's quarters.

Just as Captain Kennard reached the long, broad porch in front of the Colonel's house, his attention was attracted by the rapid galloping of a horse back of him. He turned instantly. Up the hard, dusty road that led around the parade he saw a cowboy coming at the full speed of bronco. Cowboys generally rode rapidly, he knew, but there was something in the mad, reck-

less, desperate haste of the newcomer that attracted his particular attention immediately.

The sentry at the gate stood uncertainly poising his gun. The cow-puncher had evidently paid no attention to his challenge but had brushed by him like a storm. For an instant, the soldier was at a loss what to do, but as he recovered his wits a sharp cry rang through the square:

"Halt there! Corporal of the Guard!"

The oncoming horseman paid no attention, if he even heard the summons. He raced up the driveway, drew rein before the Colonel's porch with shocking abruptness, fairly threw himself from the saddle, dropped the rein to the ground, leaving the panting horse to its own devices—glad enough was the bronco, which had been pushed nearly to death, for a few moments' respite—leaped across the porch and hammered loudly and repeatedly with his gauntleted hand upon the door.

"What's up?" asked Kennard quickly, stepping to his side.

He recognized the man as having come from the Benham ranch.

"There 's hell to pay over at the ranch," answered the cowboy. "Old Colonel Benham—"

At that instant the door of the house was opened. Colonel Wainwright, Dalton the adjutant, the orderly on duty, and the regimental bugler came out on the porch.

"Colonel Wainwright!" burst out the cowboy.

"Just a minute," interrupted the veteran officer. "Bugler, sound Officers' Call at once! Orderly, have my horse saddled and my field kit packed immediately; Mr. Dalton, make out and publish an order for A, B and K troops to prepare to take the field at once. You know the details, sir."

The two soldiers and the officer saluted, but the bugler looked at the excited cowboy fidgeting nervously on the porch, and hesitated uncertainly.

"Well," said the Colonel, sharply, noticing the delay, "what are you waiting for?"

The trumpeter, thereby recalled to himself, stepped to the edge of the porch, and instantly the loud, clear notes of the bugle went echoing through the post.

From every group of officers' quarters on the

instant the young captains and lieutenants of the several troops came running; the men also swarmed from their barracks, wondering what was up. The adjutant disappeared within the doorway; the orderly started on the double quick for the stables; the quiet post awoke to life with startling suddenness.

"Ah, Kennard, good morning," said the Colonel at last, acknowledging the young man's presence.

"Good morning, Colonel Wainwright," replied the other.

"Now, sir," the Colonel turned to the impatient and excited cowboy, "what do you want?"

"Sullivan, the ranch boss on the Benham ranch," returned the cowboy, "sent me over here to tell you that Colonel Benham has been murdered."

"What!" exclaimed the Colonel in amazement and horror.

"And Miss Benham," burst out Kennard, anxiously, his first thought for the woman.

"Who did it?" asked the Colonel.

The cow-puncher, delighted at last to be the center of attention, made prompt answer.

"Colonel Benham was shot this morning from behind by some unknown party."

"Sioux?" exclaimed the Colonel.

"Don't believe so. Suspicion points to a Half Breed with whom he had a few words night afore."

"Girot?" questioned the Colonel.

"That 's him."

"And Miss Benham? Good God, man! what of her?" cried Kennard.

The Colonel looked at the young officer in great surprise, but he said nothing.

"She's gone."

"Gone where?" asked the Colonel, noticing that Kennard reeled back as if from a blow.

"We don't know. We think the Half Breed took her away with him somewheres."

"Colonel Wainwright," choked out Kennard again, his heart in his mouth, "let me have my troop—a platoon—let me go alone, to seek for her!"

"What was she to you, Kennard?" asked Wainwright, gently, yet curiously.

"I intended to ask her to be my wife to-day and—"

"Sullivan, the ranch boss, and half the outfit is already on the trail," interposed the cowboy. "Bud Meekins is leadin' 'em."

"Let me go!"

"Wait," said the Colonel.

Before this the first of the officers had appeared on the porch. They assembled rapidly and all became at once deeply interested in what was going on, as they caught a part of the conversation, which, under the circumstances, they did not dare to interrupt. The Colonel glanced over the little group standing on the porch somewhat withdrawn to one side.

"Are you all here? Ah! every one, I see. Gentlemen," he looked at the telegram in his hand and spoke briefly, "the Sioux and the Cheyennes are on the warpath. They have already cut to pieces a detachment of the Twelfth Cavalry on the Montana Border. Crazy Horse, Roman Nose, and their bands are the leaders in the insurrection, and before nightfall the whole nation will be out. I have a telegram here from General Crook, the Department Commander, directing me to join him with every available man in the Dead Cañon of the

Rosebud without delay. The other troops of the regiment have been ordered to join us there. Troops A, B and K will prepare to take the field at once. Orders are being made ready now. Troop E will remain in charge of the post."

"Well, I call it damned hard, sir, saving your presence," broke out Franklin, commander of Troop E, "that I have to stay at home, and there is n't a man in the troop that won't feel the same."

"It is your turn, Franklin," said the Colonel, approvingly. "I like your spirit, but some one has to stay here and protect the women and children, you know, and if the war lasts long enough, you will get into the game, never fear."

Old Major Nash detached himself from the little group and lifted his hand.

"Three cheers for the orders, gentlemen!" he cried; "we will make short work of the Sioux when we catch them!"

"I 'm not so sure about that," returned the Colonel, smiling, as the hearty cheering died away; "Crazy Horse is a general, and so is Roman Nose. I have met them both. They will give

us plenty to do. Meanwhile we will march in two hours. Hasten, gentlemen. Franklin, a word with you as to what is to be done in our absence."

"And my request, Colonel?" said Kennard, as the officers separated, hurrying to take up their new duties.

"Your troop is ordered to the front, Kennard, and your duty as a soldier is to go with it," returned the veteran rather severely.

The Captain nodded. He was a soldier, there was nothing else to do.

"God help her!" he exclaimed; "I must go with my men."

"Yes," commented the old Colonel, kindly but firmly, "you are too experienced an officer at this kind of fighting to be spared."

"And what 's to be done about Colonel Benham's murder, sir?" asked the cow-puncher, who had listened to it all.

"At present, nothing, I am sorry to say. We are under orders and have no option but to march at once. I think it probable, however," he said, "that Girot has gone over to the Sioux, and in that case our best way to find Miss Benham,

whom God help, as you say, Kennard, will be to find them."

"If she is not found before night, sir," said the cowboy meaningly, "it 'll be too late. You know what them red devils are, sir, an' Girot's not apt to be any better."

Kennard clapped his hands to his face and groaned. He knew as well as did the others what it meant for a white woman to fall into such hands.

"True," said the Colonel to the cowboy, with a compassionate glance at poor Kennard. "Wait, let me think." He walked over to the young soldier, and laid his hand on his shoulder. "Kennard, how soon can you get your troop ready to move?"

"In ten minutes, sir, in five, if some one will look after our supplies," replied the other, his cheeks flushing with hope.

"Very well," said the Colonel. "Which way are the fugitives supposed to have gone?"

"The Half Breed has certainly taken the girl down the cañon, sir," answered the cowboy promptly.

"I thought so. That will be northward and

westward and in the general direction of the Rosebud, the way we want to go. Captain Kennard, suppose you take your troop toward the cañon, scouting on either side for a score of miles, and going into camp not more than forty miles from here, just by the side of that little lake on the shoulder of Cloud Peak. You know where it is? The Montana Trail passes it."

"Perfectly, sir; we will make our first camp there."

"Then I will join you with the rest of the men to-morrow."

"You will find us awaiting you there, sir."

"Perhaps you can overtake them on the way. I give you full liberty of action so long as you reach the rendezvous to-morrow morning."

"Pat Sullivan is on their trail an' he is follerin' 'em down the cañon," said the cowboy.

"In that case," said Colonel Wainwright, "if I were you I should strike straight across the prairie and hit the cañon about White Horse Rapids. They must have landed there if they went down in a boat or a canoe."

"Very good, sir, I understand," said the Cap-

tain, saluting and turning away. "Thank you and God bless you, sir," he added, as he stepped off the porch.

"Wait a moment, Kennard," said the Colonel, following after him for a final word of advice. "Remember that you are in the service of the United States and these men belong to the government. Your first duty is to your country and to your flag. If I mistake not, our services will be sorely needed presently, to prevent greater and more widespread horrors than even the murder of one man and the abduction of one woman; and while I leave you free, I am sure you will not unduly jeopardize your men by any rash, inconsiderate or headlong action."

The old man spoke earnestly and impressively. In his stern code public duty always took precedence of private affairs, however pressing.

Kennard fully understood the Commander's point of view and entered into it.

"I shall take good care of them, sir," he replied, "and you will find me by the lake when you come, or tidings of me. God grant I may overtake them and rescue her."

"Amen," said the Colonel, "and now good-by and good luck to you."

Saluting once more, Kennard broke into a run. He called to his striker as he passed his own quarters and then kept on to the barracks of the men of his troop.

The quarters were already buzzing with eager anticipation. The men were at work preparing their field kits, filling their haversacks and canteens, getting their carbine and revolver ammunition and making ready for the advance, when Kennard pressed in among them, calling out loudly for Schneider, his first sergeant, a grizzled veteran of many wars in many lands and devoted to his leader.

"Get the men together quick," he called. "We are to lead the advance. Sixty rounds and two days' rations. The other troops will look after forwarding whatever supplies we need that we cannot carry on our backs. I want the men out here in five minutes, for the honor of the troop, and—"

The troopers had heard as well as the Sergeant. The old man did not need to repeat the order. With wild and tumultuous cheers, the

men dashed for their arms, blankets and haversacks, and then rushed for the stables.

To dive into his own quarters and get into his campaign uniform was the work of a few moments. The well-trained striker had everything ready for him. Within the five minutes which he had mentioned, the troop was mounted, and lined up on the parade. Kennard took his place at the head. A few sharp words of command, and the line broke into a column of fours. Guided by the Captain, the troop trotted gently down the road.

Kennard led them past the officer's quarters and the Colonel's house. The women and children were clustered on the porches, the women white-faced and anxious, the children nervous and excited. The bolt they dreaded was about to fall. Kennard's command was visible evidence that their own beloved would follow in a short time. Cheeks were wet and eyes were blinded with tears, yet the pale lips of all joined in the hearty cheers of the soldiers left behind or preparing to follow in turn.

The men themselves looked at the matter lightly, with laughter and jest, and high antici-

pation of splendid opportunities for hard riding and good fighting—the cavalryman's ideal!—in their hearts. To paraphrase the old saying, Men may laugh, but women may wait, when the game of war is to be played.

As he drew abreast the veteran commander, Kennard saluted the Colonel, who stood at the steps to see them pass. The men of the troop, who loved "Old Glory" as they called him, as did every soldier in the regiment, broke into cheers at the sight of the straight, soldierly figure, with its bronzed face and white mustache.

Although his heart was filled with anxiety and dread unspeakable, the young Captain experienced a thrill of pride as he looked back at the lean, brown faces of the faithful men who had followed him in many a hard ride, in many a desperate Indian pursuit, over the hills and plains of the great West. He prayed as he never prayed before, that he might catch the Half Breed, and above all that he might catch him in time. With such as these men he could ride through the whole Sioux nation, he thought, so confident was he of his command.

As they trotted along, he explained the object

of their pursuit to the men. Many of them had seen the girl and had spoken with her. Any soldier was a welcome guest at the ranch, and as the news spread through the troop, they were soon as eager as their captain to catch the dastard who had committed the murder and ravished the girl away. Amy Benham had said rightly when she told the Half Breed of the pursuit.

Down the edge of the cañon Sullivan and his men were trailing him like hounds.

Across the prairie Kennard and his war dogs were racing to intercept him.

The devil he served might help him: no other power would or could.

CHAPTER VI

THE RETREAT TO THE MOUNTAINS

STARTLED by the savage apparition which at first sight he failed to recognize, the dazed Half Breed strove feebly to arise. As he did so, full consciousness came to him and he laughed faintly in the face of the stalwart brave.

"Water," he said in the guttural language of the Sioux.

The Indian impassively pointed toward the river.

"Not that kind," continued the other easily.

He fumbled in the pocket of his hunting shirt as he spoke and presently brought forth a silver mounted flask. Fortunately it was intact, although how it had escaped breaking in the buffeting he had undergone in the rapids was surprising. The Indian stared at him eagerly as he unscrewed the top and covetously as he took a long drink thereof.

It was characteristic of the man that he

thought first of himself. When the potent liquor had put new life and energy into his own veins, he turned to the girl, the Indian watching him with even more baleful intentness than before as he did so.

Without much difficulty the Half Breed turned the poor girl over upon her back. She had fainted apparently; at least she was unconscious. Gently enough with the blade of his hunting knife he separated her teeth and poured a little of the whisky down her throat.

He did not think that she had been drowned but that she had swooned, and that fact had prevented her from swallowing quantities of water during the mad battle in the rapids. If his thoughts were justified, the fiery spirit would soon restore her to life and consciousness. He watched her anxiously. He did not want to lose her now that he had dared so much for her. Sure enough, presently she opened her eyes, staring frightened and puzzled beyond his kneeling figure to the stark form of the red warrior, who bent over them both.

"She lives," triumphantly said the Half Breed, looking over his shoulder.

The tall Indian grunted his approval of the undoubted fact. Naturally he was glad so promising a prey had not escaped him.

"How do you feel, Mademoiselle," he continued, looking down at her again.

"Sorry that I have been summoned back to life where you are again," came the weak, faint, but resolute answer.

"You are doubly mine now," he said eagerly; "by two rights, that of conquest and of salvation. Had it not been for me you would have gone down in the rapids yonder."

"I wish your arm had been paralyzed before you had succeeded," said the girl, striving to sit up, and yet shrinking from his assistance when he himself raised her into a sitting position.

The Indian now broke into the conversation in the language of the Sioux, which she did not understand very well. The Half Breed made quick reply, and then repeated the substance of the remark in English as if for the girl's benefit.

"Yes, he may well be surprised," he said boastfully. "He says we are the first persons that ever came through that rapid alive.

Thanks to me," he tapped his breast proudly, "Jules Girot; I did it."

"God," said the woman softly, "has preserved my life for some purpose."

"For my purpose," was the rejoinder.

She shook her head.

"We 'll see about that presently," he continued gaily.

Then he arose to his feet and had further conversation with the newcomer. There was a word here and there which enabled her to get an inkling of the purport of the discussion if not of its whole content. She realized instantly that her captor had gone over body and soul to the Sioux; that he had cast his lot in with Crazy Horse, Chief of the Oglala band, and that this Indian was Yellow Foot, a famous sub-chief, who had command of a war party out scouting and raiding with whom the Half Breed had made a convenient rendezvous. She divined also that they were discussing most earnestly what was to be done with her; that the Indian was pressing some sort of an argument, or making some sort of an appeal, which the Half Breed was vigorously resenting. She knew, too, that her

present safety depended upon the Half Breed; that if his protection were withdrawn her honor would not be worth a moment's purchase.

She was hopeful that her captor's immediate desires and intentions toward her were pacific and propitiatory and she was reasonably confident of his ability to get and maintain his own way for a while at least, in spite of Yellow Foot and his whole band. Yet she was not absolutely certain as to either of these possibilities. Her position filled her with a sickening horror, enhanced by the helplessness in which she found herself, bound hand and foot, utterly unable even in case of necessity to strike a blow at her own heart rather than to submit to things worse than death, and take her own life. God, in His own inscrutable way, had preserved her life for some purpose. She could not believe it was to be given over to the brutality and ferocity of the red fiends or the white one. She took some comfort in that belief.

Presently the conversation was ended. In what way she could not tell save that the Indian seemed by no means satisfied, which she thought a good sign. The lashing around her feet was

untied and cast off. She was lifted up and made to stand. The first steps she took were exquisitely painful, she had been so long secured so tightly in so cramped a position, but presently strength came back to her and in obedience to the command of the Half Breed, she accompanied him as he followed the Indian across the beach and up a winding ravine that led from the river bank to the uplands.

When she reached the level of the plateau she was surprised to find waiting there a considerable band of Sioux and Cheyennes, all painted for the warpath. With them, although it was distinctly contrary to every Indian precedent of which she had ever heard, there was a woman, a full-blooded Indian squaw, apparently the wife of Yellow Foot. What power she had employed to be permitted to follow her husband, or whether, as was more likely, having been afield on errands of her own, she had stumbled upon the party by chance and then stayed with it, did not appear. Her appearance, however, afforded Amy Benham the one ray of comfort in the situation. Not because of the fact that she was a woman, for the Indian squaws were often

more cruel, vindictive and malevolent than the braves themselves, but because this particular squaw was known to the white woman, and because the white woman had befriended her in days past.

As the little party approached the crowd reclining indolently under the trees, Mah-wissa, the Blue Bird, for so the squaw was named, looked stolidly into the face of the white woman, and turned indifferently away without giving the slightest sign of recognition. The girl's senses were acutely sharpened by the dangers of her position, and she divined instantly that for some reason no sign of mutual recognition was to be given. Indeed, it seemed at first as if the squaw had made a mistake in her indifference, for all the other Indians crowded eagerly around the Half Breed, the Chief and—prize of all prizes!—the white woman.

There was more excited conversation and much pointing backward on the trail, each man entitled to speak explaining by voice, sign language and other methods his ideas. Finally the Chief gave some sort of orders, and the men of the party went back behind the low hill and

brought out the ponies. From the spare mounts, of which there were a number, one was provided for the white woman and another for the Indian squaw. The latter was apparently told off especially to watch the former, for to her was given the halter of Amy Benham's pony. As before, she was mounted astride, and her feet tied beneath the belly of the horse. The Half Breed and Yellow Foot took the lead. An old warrior with three or four adventurous young bucks was ordered to bring up the rear. The others surrounded the two women and the whole party trotted rapidly across the upland toward the now not distant foothills of the range.

Miserable, indeed, were the reflections of the white woman. She had heard terrible tales of the frontier since she was a child. She knew no white woman of her race had ever been in such a position and had ever come forth from the adventure unharmed. It seemed to her that the wreck of her life had begun. Yet, even in her awful desperation she did not quite give up heart. Every hour which passed leaving her still unharmed added to the chances of her rescue, faint though they were at best.

In the first place she knew that long ere this Sullivan and the men of the ranch would be on her trail. She was equally confident that Kennard would not be long after the big cattleman. She had confidence in the skill and daring of the one, and in the devotion and the persistence of the other. With two such men in pursuit of him, the Half Breed would eventually be overtaken. They might be too late for anything but vengeance, but at least there would be no delay. Meanwhile, she could only pray and pray she did as she had never prayed before in her short young life.

God seems far away sometimes to people in trouble. To her He was most imminent. She had no one but Him, and to Him, as she rode along with half-closed eyes, swaying uneasily as the road grew rougher, winding through the foothills and up toward the vast bulk of the range itself, she poured out her soul in fervent, if voiceless petition. She besought God to preserve her and restore her to the arms of the man she now realized she loved with all her soul.

Conventionality, maidenly hesitation disappeared from her heart like the night mist before

the rising sun. In her dire extremity she saw things nakedly, just as they were, and she was not ashamed. She admitted to herself that she loved him as she realized that he loved her, and she prayed for him.

In the midst of her own sufferings she could even feel a pang of pity as she thought how Kennard must be undergoing all the tortures of the damned; and Sullivan, too, although her appreciation of his feelings was less thorough than in the case of the former man, for the ranchman had been big enough not to tell her of his hopes and dreams, and she looked upon him almost as a second father, or perhaps as she might have looked upon a big brother; yet she knew how his heart would be wrung, too. Her own peril and the terror of it did not make her forget her poor murdered father either, but her grief for him could not be as poignant as it would otherwise have been because of her deadly and all-engrossing apprehension. Nor was it for her life that she feared either.

She opened her eyes and stared at the Half Breed. She found time to marvel again at the temerity of the man inviting upon himself such

avengers of blood, such furies, as would be these two men to whom her thoughts went back again and again.

Sometimes she looked over at the squaw riding imperturbably by her side. If her eyes met those of the Indian woman, as before, they stared at her blankly, with no sign of recognition. Sometimes, indeed, the squaw with rude voice and threatening mien seemed to be pouring objurgations in her native language upon her helpless companion, which greatly amused the younger men, who proceeded eagerly to gather about her, but after a word or two of warning from Yellow Foot and fierce, threatening looks from the Half Breed, they did not otherwise molest her. She was the property of their ally and friend and as such they would hold her sacred, although how long they would have done so had she not been under the protection of the Chief, also, was a question not affording much room for speculation.

Indians are ruthless riders. No brute beast on earth has so sad a fortune in life as an Indian pony. It is cheaper to kill them than to care for them, the Indians think. They were in a

fierce hurry. The Half Breed was not so oblivious of the avengers of blood as he seemed. He wanted to put a great distance between the ranch and himself before night fell. And he communicated his desires to the band, who seemed no less anxious than he to get away. They had already been doing some bloody raiding on their own account and several new scalps dangling from their belts told the awful story. They rode the ponies on, reckless of any possible consequences to them, indeed killing some of them in their unsparing urgency and then mounting others from the herd, until toward late in the afternoon they had penetrated well into the heart of the great mountain range.

The Half Breed, to whom the Big Horn Mountains were as familiar as his cabin, led the way, and presently about two hours before dark, they entered upon a gloomy cañon. A narrow trail led along one of the sides, half way between the bottom and the crest. They had to go in single file and trust to the sure-footedness of their ponies. Indeed, many of the Indians dismounted and elected to go through on foot.

Amy Benham was one of those perforce left

on her horse. Her hands had not been untied. The strain of the long hours had paralyzed them. Even the fierce pains of earlier in the day had been succeeded by a numb, dead feeling horrible to think on. She was absolutely helpless to guide her bronco. She could only trust that it might get through safely. She found herself staring over the side at the great depths beneath them, wondering whether it would not be better to throw her body violently in that direction and thus cause the pony to lose his footing, and send them both crashing to death below, than to proceed to what ghastly fate probably awaited her at the end of the journey.

Certainly any death would be welcome rather than the awful end that must eventually be hers if she were not rescued. But she was young and she clung to life. She clung to the hope that she might find some means of dying when the actual moment came. Meanwhile she would live on and wait. Yet again and again she swayed toward the cañon, and perhaps might have gone over had it not been that for one moment Mahwissa, who had dismounted with the rest and was leading the white woman's pony, flashed one

glance of intelligent entreaty back at her in the growing dusk.

Did the savage Indian woman divine what was in her white sister's heart? Was she offering encouragement to wait for possible help later on?

These questions ran through the girl's mind, and again upbuoyed by her hopes, she decided in the affirmative. At any rate, she remained still on her horse until the perilous passage had been made.

CHAPTER VII

THE CAMP IN THE CANON

ROUNDING a sharp and dangerous angle in the walls of the cañon, where the trail itself diminished to a mere thread, the war party with its prisoner found itself on a wide level shelf suitable for camping. The rocks overhung it, making it almost a cave. The way on up the cañon from there appeared broad and easy. The trail widened and ascended to the upper levels a short distance beyond the shelf. A spring of water gushed from the rocks hard by, and fell musically over the edge into the depths. The place was most convenient for a camp. It was sheltered and hidden as well.

The band had traveled with the greatest possible rapidity and had put many miles, the girl thought with sinking heart, between them and the distant ranch where her dead father lay—her father, her good old father, with whom she had hoped to live through so many years of

peace and happiness. She had scarcely had time to think upon him. He had, as it were, been blotted out of her mind by her own frightful peril. Even now she could hardly realize the whole situation. The action had been so swift, so unexpected. She had been allowed no leisure for grief. She had seen him foully murdered before her eyes, and yet he seemed to be still alive, waiting for her, watching over her—perhaps, in truth, he was.

She sat her weary horse listlessly, inertly, until the Half Breed came, untied the lashing that bound her feet, and lifted her down. Then for the first time since the morning he cast off the rope that bound her arms to her sides. She was totally without any power of moving them. His experience had taught him what would be her situation and he vigorously chafed her arms, in spite of her faint remonstrances, until the blood again flowed freely in them but with an exquisite agony, which after a time abated somewhat; until, although they were still stiff and very sore, and motion was very painful, she could use them. He had made no search of her and did not know that she had a small knife hidden beneath the

loose white waist she wore, and she was most careful in no way to betray to him that fact.

She was allowed a certain freedom because of the absolute hopelessness of escape. One Indian was sent back along the trail to the narrowest part of the pass, where the turn in the cañon gave opening to the broad shelf. The rocks overhanging it above prevented any one commanding it from the top of the cañon, and a man or two stationed at the upper end of the trail on the far side from which no danger was to be apprehended, could see a vast expanse of country and give ample warning of the approach of a possible enemy. In no direction was escape possible to her unaided efforts.

So secure were they in this mountain fastness that the Indians even kindled a fire from some of the store of wood which had been accumulated within the recesses of a cave-like opening at the back, evidently for just such purposes as this, for the camp was apparently a favorite one with the Half Breed or with the Indians. Meat was soon cooking, and in a short time her portion, which was supplemented by some hard bread that the Half Breed had somehow pro-

cured, and a canteen full of cold spring water, was handed to her. She ate and drank ravenously. For one reason she was frightfully hungry, and for another, just as before, she would eat that she might live and battle for her honor and her freedom. She needed all her strength.

The Half Breed left her to herself until the meal was over and pipes had been produced. Then he came toward her.

What was he about to do? She rose to her feet to meet him. He realized he had made a mistake when he saw her step swiftly to the very brink of the cañon and stand poised thereon.

"Girot," she said as he approached her, "if you do not stop where you are, I shall leap into the cañon."

She said it quietly, without any unusual emphasis. There was a bright moon that night and it shone down through the cañon. She was far enough from the overhanging wall to be in its full light. He could see every feature of her face distinctly. There was that in her bearing, and in her voice, quiet though it was, which convinced him that she spoke the truth.

"Is that the measure of your hatred, Made-

moiselle?" he answered in savage disappointment, for he could not conceive that any one could be permanently indifferent to him.

"No," she said, "there is no measure to it."

"You mean—"

Now, she had meant that her hatred was boundless, deep and black as the yawning cañon, high and firm as the mountain summit. But, on the instant, there flashed into her mind the possibility that she might by her woman's wit deceive him. The Indians were lazily smoking around the fire save for the solitary man out of sight, watching the narrow trail, and the two or three far beyond on the uplands. The Indian woman sat apart intently observing the two. No one else was watching them. From where the girl stood on the edge of the shelf she could see the squaw, who was sitting quietly facing her some distance from the fire. Her hands were clasped as if in entreaty. What could she mean? Was there a suggestion that the white woman should temporize, a plea that she would not throw herself over the shelf?

Amy Benham knew that the squaw spoke fair English, and understood the language, for she

herself had taught her in days gone by and she knew that the Indian woman must have comprehended every word she said to Girot and he to her. What could she desire? What did she propose? At any rate her own idea and this unconscious suggestion ran together. She would act upon them.

"If I come nearer to you and leave this brink, will you promise not to harm me?" she asked.

"I swear it."

"On what?"

"On what you will, by the blood of my father, by the memory of my mother."

Now, if the Half Breed ever had any religion at all, which was doubtful, it was a compound of Indian superstition, with a smattering of Christian teaching. He wore a crucifix around his neck, marvelously carved, a beautiful piece of workmanship.

"Swear by that," she said, pointing.

"By your Christ, I swear," said the Half Breed with his hands upon the holy emblem.

Instantly she stepped toward him, and he started to advance to her, but she motioned him back.

"No," she said, "not yet. Give me time."

"Time!" he cried in exultant triumph, "you mean—"

She actually forced herself to smile on him, red-handed murderer though he was. As she did so she noticed the Indian woman nodding, after a furtive glance at the figures about the fire, who, because they were so near the light, and were dazzled by it, could see little that went on in the darkness beyond.

"You must guess what I mean," said the girl, forcing herself to speak pleasantly and striving to give a certain emphasis to her words. "You have paid for my father's life by saving my own," she added, praying God to forgive her the deceit.

"True, true," exclaimed the man, drawing himself up proudly and throwing his head back like a conqueror; "there is no one else in the world who has ever come through White Horse Rapids alone, to say nothing of bringing a woman. But I have done so and I love you."

"It was splendid," said the girl, once again, waving him off with another gesture as he would fain come nearer her. "And I appreciate it.

I was mad when I spoke of throwing myself off the brink a moment since. I did it to try you, to test your affection."

"Then you do not hate me?"

"Hate you!" she cried, striving with all her soul not to give the real significance to the monosyllables that she forced her lips to utter cheerfully. "But you see it is so sudden, and—" she hesitated, "give me time! You are so powerful, so masterful, I realize you are the only protector I have from these Indians, that without you I should be—"

He nodded.

"You say truly, Mademoiselle."

"I appreciate all of that, but you said that you wanted to win me. Won't you give me a chance to learn to—to care"—she could not force her lips to say "love"—"for you?" she ran on desperately. "I am so tired now and worn out. This has been a hard, rough wooing. I have been bound fast a long time and I am nearly dead for want of sleep. In the morning, as you are a gentleman—"

Hideous perversion of the word, she thought, hating herself at the same time for her duplicity

and yet thrilling to see that it was working. She had struck the right trail to the stronghold of his vanity.

"As I am a gentleman, Mademoiselle," he said in eager joy, "you shall rest undisturbed this night. My hand upon it—"

He held out his hand theatrically, as he spoke. The hand stained with her father's blood! She forced herself by the exercise of as terrible a constraint as was ever put upon a woman's soul to touch it with her own. At the same time that she did so, her left hand slid to the knife hid beneath the loose blouse she wore. If he meant to break his word—well, she was not sufficiently removed from the brink to render it impossible to throw herself over and perhaps drag him along with her. But evidently she had succeeded in cozening him completely, for without drawing her toward him, he pressed his lips upon her hand with some gallant habit of gesture and some grace of manner inherited from bygone France of long centuries before.

"You shall sleep there," he pointed to the dark recess, "and Mah-wissa, Yellow Foot's wife, shall sleep with you. I, myself, will see that no

harm comes to you. I am a great man among the Sioux. There is war in the land. Crazy Horse leads and all the other chiefs will follow. There will be blood. He is a great chief and I shall be his friend and counselor."

"But the United States will win in the end," said the girl.

"Oh, yes, perhaps so, but there is always British Columbia. We can be far away."

"Yes," she said, "far away."

"In the morning, then, Mademoiselle, I shall find you."

"In the morning," said the girl, "you shall find me all that I ought to be toward you."

It was a daring thing to say, but he was so blinded by her apparent complaisance, by the probable realization of his hopes, and further by his egregious self-conceit, that he failed to comprehend the double meaning of her words.

Saluting her like a gentleman by doffing his hat, he bowed low before her, turned and spoke a few words to Mah-wissa and left her to her own devices for the time being.

CHAPTER VIII

MAH-WISSA, THE BLUE BIRD

SOMEHOW or other, when Amy Benham laid herself down to rest if she could on the hard, rough stones in the niche farthest away from the dying camp fire and nearest the narrow entrance to the trail, with the form of the Indian woman quite near and interposing between her and the rest of the party, she experienced a sense of safety and security which she had not hitherto enjoyed in that long and awful day. Even the hard rocks upon which she reclined were not uncomfortable to her. She could stretch her tired limbs upon them and get some ease and rest. She had passed through enough since that blighted morning to have broken the nerve and courage of gigantic Sullivan himself, she thought.

Yet sleep was far away from her. She lay with wide-open eyes staring past the Indian woman, toward the group around the fire. They

had nothing to keep them awake, and, like most primitive peoples, grew sleepy so soon as it became dark. They, too, had gone through a hard day, and they had neither compunctions of conscience nor premonitions of trouble to keep them awake and on the alert. One after another they early wrapped themselves in their blankets and disposed themselves for the night around the dying embers of the fire. The night was warm enough, they were well sheltered and protected and there was no need to keep up the fire. Fuel was not abundant and it was therefore permitted to die out.

The Half Breed, who had been smoking and talking with the rest, rose to his feet after a while and took a step or two in her direction. Her heart throbbed wildly and her hands sought the knife which she had kept concealed. But the man evidently thought better of whatever intention he had cherished, if indeed there had been any motive in his movements, for he turned back and presently laid down with the others, and so far as she could judge, soon went to sleep.

The Indian woman near her, who had watched

the course of events as closely as the white girl, did not move for a long time thereafter. Yet she did not sleep herself and took occasion to signify to her companion by gesture that she was wide awake. Amy Benham was more confident than ever that in her she had most opportunely found a friend. She trusted to the savage woman's instinct to decide upon just the right time for telling her whatever there was to be told and for doing whatever there was to be done. So with growing hope and excitement, she waited, praying.

Finally, after perhaps a vigil of two hours or more, during which the last ember of the fire had seemingly died out, Mah-wissa turned and, without making a sound, laid her hand upon her white sister. The girl immediately sat up. Mah-wissa, thereupon, noiselessly arose to her feet, extended her hand and lifted her companion to her side. As she did so, a thought seemed to strike her. She knelt down and examined by touch the feet of the girl. She discovered, as she had suspected, that Amy was wearing a pair of low shoes, little more than morning slippers. Had they not been secured by a strap which but-

toned about her ankles she would have lost them long since in all probability.

Motioning the girl to sit again, the squaw rapidly drew off the slippers. Taking off her own moccasins, she tied them securely on the white woman's feet. Then the two rose again and in obedience to a gesture, Amy Benham followed the Indian woman, who led the way, slowly and cautiously along the deep, black, impenetrable shadow of the rock toward the trail over which they had come.

Their progress was very deliberate. Mahwissa did not put her bare feet down until by exploring she discovered no loose pebble which by its rolling might cause them to slip and awaken those lightest of sleepers, the Indians behind them, to say nothing of the Half Breed. Amy, herself, was not without some Western skill of her own as a trailer, and she was nerved to the occasion by the desperate hazard. She was even more cautious in her going than the squaw.

She did not know what was about to happen, but she realized that some effort for her freedom was being made, and that her safety lay in si-

lently following the motions of her guide without question or hesitation. She was sufficiently intelligent, although she had never accompanied a war party before, to see the necessity of stationing a watchman at the mouth of the trail up which they had to come. How they were to pass that watchman she did not divine. If she thought at all about it, moving ghostlike and silent along the cliff wall, she supposed the squaw had made some arrangement with him to let them pass. At any rate, she was helpless, and could only follow blindly on. Slow as was their progress, they traversed the ground at last.

Now the moon had so far sunk with reference to the cañon that its light fell on but one spot, and that was the jutting point around which they must pass, and beyond which the sentry watched the trail. By no possibility could they yet have been observed, even if any had been awake, from the main body of sleepers, but if any one were awake when they rounded that point, discovery would be certain.

Amy resolved that rather than be retaken after having thus ventured upon an attempt to escape, especially since she had tried to deceive the Half

Breed with promises of a different state of mind, in the morning, she would at once leap over the cliff, for she knew that with such a demonstration of the falsity of her promises as her flight presented, she might expect no mercy.

Just before it became necessary to step into the moonlight, the Indian woman turned, and with a gesture halted her companion.

"Wait," she whispered faintly, the first word she had spoken.

Amy nodded. The next moment, flashing white for a second in the moonlight, the squaw with a few swift, noiseless steps disappeared around the promontory.

Anxiously looking back from the shadow toward the group about the fire, the woman discovered no evidence that they had been observed. All was still behind her as before. No one moved. No one called out. Then her glance turned forward in the direction her guide had gone. She could hear no noise that way either, except the wind softly swaying the pines far above her head, or soughing gently down the narrow mountain pass. The gentle night breeze cooled her aching head and burning cheeks.

Her lips were parched with thirst; she strove in vain to moisten them with her tongue and would have given much for a drink of water. So she waited, expectant, fearful, hopeful.

What was happening on the other side of that promontory? She strained her ears for possible whispers of conversation, but none came back to her. She stared at the sharp edge of the rock around which the trail bent so quickly as to make the feat of leading horses there almost an incredible one.

Suddenly something seemed to move on the edge of the rock. Cautiously a head peered around it. Moonlight disclosed a face, the face of Mah-wissa. There was no mistake about it. The squaw caught the white woman's eye. There was a little backward jerk of her head and she was gone. The meaning of the signal was obvious. Amy Benham was to come on. The way was open, safe.

Nerving herself for the fearful passage, and realizing that she was not so sure-footed or so clear-headed as the squaw and that it would take longer for her to make the turn, and that therefore the chances that she would be seen

would be greater, she started forward. She would fain have closed her eyes in view of the yawning gulf to her right, but she held them bravely open, and stepped on. Now she was in the full moonlight. She could hear her heart beating so loud that it seemed to send echoes rolling down the cañon. She was sure that she was observed. She expected every second to hear the alarm cry behind her; to feel a bullet in her back. She would have given worlds to have looked back but could not do so. She must press on. It took but a second or two but it seemed hours before she rounded the rock.

Then she stopped, breathing hard, leaning against the wall to the left of her and listened. Again nothing broke the profound silence; no voice, no call, no footsteps. She had not been observed apparently. In the relief from the awful strain she swayed and would have fallen had not the Indian woman caught her and given her a little shake of impatience as she did so, which recalled her to herself.

This side of the promontory was in full moonlight. The first object that greeted her eyes was the dead body of the Indian who had been

the sentry, sprawling on his face, on the narrow trail. They had to step over him to go farther.

"You killed him!" whispered the awe-struck girl.

The Indian woman nodded indifferently. She was not inclined to speech, and apparently considering the matter of no consequence and not worth discussion, she pressed on down the trail. She went carefully still, but more and more swiftly, until by and by, as the path widened and became more practicable, she broke into an Indian dog trot, her companion pressing hard upon her heels.

Now it is probable that more ground can be covered in less time, if the distance be a long one, at that gait than any other, but the pace is a telling one, especially on uneven ground, the ups and downs of a rocky trail. Moreover, while the moccasin is the best of running shoes for those who are used to it, it does not take the place on the civilized foot of a stout boot for such going as that.

Amy Benham was a splendidly developed girl. Every athletic exercise to which young womanhood is addicted she had practiced and

"You killed him?" whispered the awe-struck girl

DO NOT
CIRCULATE

become proficient in, and her young muscles were in thorough training. She had all the vigor and strength of that west wind for which she was named. But, as the moments passed by until perhaps two hours or more had elapsed, in their silent plod, plod, plod, down the cañon, her strength began to give out. She lagged farther and farther behind, until presently the squaw herself turned and saw her condition. The white girl was in fact utterly worn out.

Mah-wissa stopped instantly. By great good fortune the break-down had occurred just at the one practicable spot for a descent to the cañon, where if they could cross the river a lateral cañon seemed to open a way for further progress. Although to where it led they were ignorant, they could see a rift in the opposite wall, which might probably afford them shelter, for in their condition they could no longer proceed along the present trail until they reached the broad plateau at the mouth of the cañon, with its woods and hills, among which they might perhaps have hidden.

The best thing for them to do under the circumstances, Mah-wissa decided, would be to de-

scend to the level of the stream, cross it, ascend the lateral cañon and conceal themselves in some crevice in the walls of the mountain on the other side. The ground was rocky and it was likely that trailing would be more difficult, besides, the Indians would not dare retrace their steps too far. Otherwise they would be running into some of the parties which Amy Benham and Mah-wissa divined would be following after them. The chances of escape therefore were ultimately favorable to these two.

Mah-wissa did the thinking for the party. Amy left the decision entirely to her. Indeed, she was too worn out to determine anything. Seeing how exhausted the girl was, the Indian woman pointed to the declivity, sharp enough in all conscience, and immediately turned and slipped over the surface wall. For her to decide was to attempt. The moon, now low on the horizon, still gave them enough light to enable them to reach the bottom safely. Otherwise they would have been totally unable to make the descent without falling. As it was, it was a fearful adventure. With clothes torn, with bleeding hands, with bruised body, with moccasins in

rags, Amy Benham finally reached the level of the river. The squaw had also suffered in the descent but not to the extent of the more delicately nurtured white woman.

Tired, exhausted, bruised, broken, suffering though they were, they did not dare to rest more than five minutes to recover breath and resummon strength. Fortunately they had struck the stream at a point where it was possible to cross the swift-flowing river by means of huge bowlders which had been rolled down from either side in the floods of centuries which had swept through the cañon. Leaping from rock to rock, now landing upon some jagged pinnacle, now sliding on some slippery knob, several times the white girl would have fallen into the raging torrent but for the ready assistance of the Indian woman. At last they reached the other side.

CHAPTER IX

THE HELP OF THE HELPLESS

AMY BENHAM fell panting on the little patch of soft, wet sand which had accumulated behind a jutting bowlder which deflected the current of the stream. As she sank down, she pointed to her feet. Mah-wissa stooped and examined them. The moccasins had been badly torn but there was still some service in them. The squaw wore the usual Indian blanket. With the same knife with which she had stabbed the watcher in the trail, she cut long strips from it and bound them deftly about the other's feet. Her own, in the moccasins which she had taken from the Indian she had killed, were also bruised and bleeding, but that did not matter; she was used to that sort of thing, and with the stoical endurance of her race, she would go without complaint until the very flesh was stripped from the bones.

Laving her face and hands in the cool water

of the river, and drinking copious draughts of it, restored Amy somewhat. Presently she rose, weary but ready for the further progress that was inevitable. With Mah-wissa once more in the lead, the two tired but indomitable women turned into the black opening in the mountain wall to their right.

They soon found that they were in a steep lateral cañon, the trend of which was generally upward. Fortunately the going was not too hard at first, for the rift apparently led to a grassy upland, and recent rains had washed the soil down until the sharp rocks had been hid by a covering of soft earth. A half hour's desperate climb, every moment growing more difficult and more dangerous, at last brought them to the top. The ground fell away sharply in front of them. The wall of the cañon behind them was evidently a sharp ridge barely scalable at that point, the only one for miles in its long, twisting course, by the way.

Off to the right the mountains rose again in the shape of gigantic cliffs. To the left, so far as they could tell in the now almost vanished moonlight, lay a deep valley. The sinking

moon indicated that several miles away rose another lower wall of rocks. It seemed to them that they had practically crossed the range in their desperate flight.

They did not waste much time in speculating upon the scenery, but with Mah-wissa once more leading, they plodded rapidly down the steep declivity, keeping carefully toward the rise of the mountain wall on the right. They stayed just far enough from it to avoid the great mass of bowlders and broken rocks which lay at the feet of the high precipice to the northward. They staggered wearily, but desperately on, this time side by side.

There being now no danger of their being overheard, Amy Benham ventured to speak openly with her companion. There was something which ought to be explained. She wanted to know why the squaw had made such a sacrifice for her, and put herself in such danger, for well Amy Benham knew that short would be the shrift of the Indian woman if they were caught by any of the tribe.

Some years before this tremendous adventure, while on a hunting expedition with her father

and other friends, she had met Mah-wissa. Riding a few miles from the hunting camp one morning, up one of the valleys her father claimed as his own, she had come across a wretched Indian woman holding in her arms a baby. The woman had a few belongings about her, a little food, a sorry pony, and a tattered tepee, but she seemed utterly oblivious to anything except the child she held to her breast, who was suffering from a case of malignant smallpox. When the little pappoose, her first and only child, had developed the disease, the woman had been mercilessly turned out of the camp and left with her offspring until both recovered or perished—Hagar and Ishmael again!

Ninety-nine white men and women out of a hundred would have fled from possible infection in horror, but, as I have said, Amy Benham, this daughter of the West, was always in the hundredth woman class. Her woman's heart was touched by the plight of her forlorn and desolate red sister. She had some knowledge of medicine and she actually stayed out on the heath, withdrawing herself from the hunting party, for-

bidding any of them to come near her, and remained with the poor squaw, doing what she could for the abandoned woman and child until the child died. Even then, she remained still longer, until it was quite evident that there was no danger of any further infection to either of them.

Thereafter, one night, with brief, taciturn words of acknowledgment in her broken English, the squaw had bade her farewell and had turned away on her long tramp northwest to join her own people. That she had not forgot the kindness of the white woman was quite evident from what she was doing now. Truly the West Wind had scattered bread upon the waters, and it had returned to her after these many days.

"Mah-wissa," said Amy, "what did you do to the man in the pass?"

"Kill him. He kick me away from camp when pappoose sick. They all do same."

"But your husband?"

"He say 'go' then. He beat me."

"Are you not Yellow Foot's wife?"

"He plenty other squaw. Me only one," re-

turned the woman darkly. "Me gone, he no care."

"How did you come to be with that war party?"

"Hear Girot make plan take you. I follow long time. Find them last night. Yellow Foot say, 'She here, she stay.' I come help save you."

"God bless you!" cried the girl.

"I no forget," returned the other gravely.

In the dim light Amy reached out and caught the small, brown hand of her companion and pressed it ardently.

"You have saved me from more than death!" she said.

The squaw nodded. She perfectly well knew from what she had saved her white sister.

"I do not know how I can ever thank you as long as I live," continued the girl in grateful earnestness.

"You brave woman," was the answer. "You no 'fraid. My little pappoose, he die hold your hands. I no forget."

"But your own people?"

"They no care. They drive me away. I

stay with you now all time. I live with you. I die with you."

The words of an old, old book, the book of Holy Writ, came into Amy's mind.

> Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people and thy God my God; Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried; the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me.

In effect the untutored Indian woman was saying what Ruth had said to Naomi so long ago on the other side of the world.

This matter now settled to Amy's satisfaction, they plodded on for a few moments more in silence, saving all their breath for their work. By this time the white woman was utterly exhausted and even the indomitable Indian woman began to show signs of distress. Just as Amy was about to declare her inability to go a step farther, the Indian woman started, stopped, turned her head so that her ear could catch any sound from the direction whence they had come. Naturally Amy suited her action to the other's, and both stood listening, the white woman for she knew not what.

Presently she started violently. Faint and far, yet sufficiently distinct to identify it, they heard cracking sounds as though of the firing of rifles. They had come a great distance from the camp of the night, but the peculiar formation of the cañon in which it had been pitched served to intensify the sound of rifle shots and send their echoings rolling far into the vast space about them. There was no doubt about it! There was firing at the camp! Their escape had been discovered. Pursuit would be begun.

Instantly the two women turned to each other. Tightening their hand clasp, they broke into a staggering run, their first thought being to put further distance between them and those whom they feared would be upon their track. Terror lent them strength for a little space. Desperation renewed their courage. With racked muscles and tired feet and broken bodies, they toiled on, listening as they ran for further sounds, which, however, did not come. Why should there be additional firing? Once the alarm had been given they would be hunted silently.

On and on they went until the first faint fore-

runner of dawn appeared in the east, when suddenly, without a word, Mah-wissa plunged headlong. With a convulsive shudder, she lay still where she had fallen. Utterly at loss to account for it, the girl, overwhelmed and appalled by the suddenness of the catastrophe, dropped on her knees beside her friend and turned her over on her face. Blood was flowing freely from a jagged wound in her forehead, caused by her head striking a rock when she fell. Fortunately, they were near water. A spring, seen faintly in the dim gray light of the coming day, bubbled out of the rocks near by. Desperately rising to her feet, the girl dragged herself to the spring, a strip torn from her skirt was soaked in the cool water, and she came back and applied it to the prostrate Indian's head. She was made of stout stuff, this savage, and was soon revived. She sat up, and as she did so, in spite of her Indian stoicism, groaned.

"What is it?" asked the girl in anxious tenderness.

"Foot," was the grim answer, as the brave woman bit her lips to stifle any further expression of her suffering.

An examination revealed the fact that—wonder of wonders for an Indian!—Mah-wissa had sprained her ankle severely in her hurry. This had caused her to fall and be knocked senseless. Her present agony would have made a less stoical person scream with the anguish.

"I am afraid," Amy said at last, "it is badly sprained. You cannot walk upon it. O God, what shall we do?"

"You go on," said Mah-wissa. "Leave me. They find me. I no tell where you go."

"No," was the reply; "I shall stay with you." If Ruth would not leave Naomi, she thought to herself, neither would Naomi leave Ruth. "We must hide somewhere. Perhaps they cannot find us here. Our trail ought to be hard to follow. If it rains it will be completely obliterated. See! it looks threatening."

"Rain will come," said Mah-wissa, "but maybe too late."

"We shall have to chance it," said the other woman resolutely. "Meanwhile, we must stay here anyway, for I can go no farther. I am worn out." Here she pointed to her own feet; the strips of blanket were stained with blood.

"Look," she said; "every step is torture to me. I am ready to die and we will die together if need be."

"You good woman! You brave woman!" said the Indian gently, her eyes luminous.

"No," said the girl quietly, "I am only doing as I would be done by. I am doing for you what you have tried to do for me. First, I will bathe and bind up your ankle, and then, we will wait here quietly and rest until daybreak, then we will see what is to be done. God has helped us. He will not desert us now, I am sure."

CHAPTER X

THE TRAIL THROUGH THE MOUNTAINS

THE day on which the soldiers left Fort McCullough was not to pass without its adventures. Proceeding as rapidly as his experience had taught him was consistent with the most judicious use of his horses, Kennard's troop had made great progress. The going was fine, comparatively speaking. They were hampered by no deep ravines or treacherous quicksands. These would come later when they struck the river below the rapids. They took every advantage of the situation, therefore, to gain on the fugitives.

They unsaddled and rested for an hour at noon, although if the Captain had consulted his own inclinations he would have pressed on resolutely without stopping for a moment. The brief respite, however, was well devised, for they were all much refreshed by it and were able to

make better time in the afternoon than otherwise.

About two o'clock, Kennard, riding in advance, heard the sound of rifle shots from the other side of the hill in front of them. A half dozen reports caught his ear, and the sound seemed to indicate that some one was making a running fight and coming toward them. Noiselessly, without sound of bugle, he deployed his men. The troopers took wide distance and thus covered a considerable expanse of country. Rifles were unslung, and every preparation made for whatever emergency might develop. All things being in readiness, the troopers trotted toward the crest of the hill.

They had scarcely attained midway of the slope when over its brow burst two Indians fleeing at the full speed of their ponies. Astonished at the appearance of the soldiers, the two Indians checked their ponies violently, swerved to the right, and made a rush for life and freedom.

With shouts of triumph the troopers dashed upon them. A well-directed volley from the nearest soldiers killed the horses and one of the

Indians. The other struggled to his feet as his horse fell, discharged his rifle harmlessly at the nearest soldier, and was in turn shot and ridden down at the same time.

The dash of the troop carried it to the top of the hill before it was spent. Some little distance away they saw four men galloping toward the crest. Evidently these had been pursuing the Indians, who, in their endeavor to escape, had run into the arms of Kennard's troop. A few moments and the two parties had joined. Under the orders of Hamilton and Bodley, the two lieutenants, the company had rapidly reformed in line and halted. Kennard, attended by Hamilton, rode forward to meet the newcomers. It was they who broke the silence.

"You got 'em, I see," said the grizzled little old man who seemed to be leading the party.

"Yes," said Kennard, "we did. Who and what are they?"

"They 're Oglala Sioux. We think they belongs to a party that was connected with the killin' of old Colonel Benham an' the abductin' of his gal this mornin'."

"Have you any tidings of Miss Benham?" asked Kennard eagerly.

"None yit. We thought we mought git some from them fellers," answered the old man, pointing to the dead Indians. "Who mought you be?" he asked.

"I am Captain Kennard of the United States Army, and you are—"

"My name is Meekins, giner'ly called 'Bud' round these parts. I 'm hunter, trapper, an' prospector."

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Meekins; I 've heard of you often," answered the soldier, reaching out his hand, which the other took and shook vigorously. "I am on the same quest. The Sioux are out and the Cheyennes will join them."

Meekins nodded.

"I heerd it," he said.

"Colonel Wainwright got a telegram from General Crook this morning. We are ordered to move and join the General on the Rosebud—the Dead Cañon. You know where it is."

"Sartin."

"I have been given the privilege of coming

out a few hours in advance to search for Miss Benham and her abductors."

"Well, I am on that same trail, Cap'n," Meekins began, his eyes sparkling. "We traced 'em down to the river by the ranch, an' then found the trail of their hosses crossin' the river an' takin' to the uplands. There was signs also that somebody had gone down the river in a canoe. We divided our party, some for the river and others for the hosses, an' as I 'm the best trailer in the bunch, I follered this lead. Sullivan an' the others went down the river. Where be you bound for?"

"I thought I would strike the river below White Horse Rapids and see if I could pick up the trail there."

"That 'll be the best plan. I 'll go 'long with you, me an' these gents, if you 've no objection. What say ye, Johnson?"

"Sure," was the reply of the cattleman. "That 's what we come for."

"Now then, Cap'n, if you want us to go with you," continued Meekins.

"I should be delighted to have a man of your experience and ability to take up the trail, and

these other gentlemen to augment my small force."

"Right you are then," said the old trapper. "Meanwhile, I better take a look at these dead bucks here."

He dismounted as he spoke, stooped to the side of the dead Indians, turned them over and examined them carefully.

"They're Oglalas all right. Probably belong to some sub-chief of Crazy Horse's band. Look, Cap'n, they're painted for war, an' well armed too. They've got better guns than you fellers have. If I was you, I'd take their weepin's."

"A good suggestion," said the Captain. "Schneider, disarm these dead bodies. We may need their guns."

"An' I suppose," said the old trapper, "you wouldn't mind my takin' their scalps."

"I certainly should," said Kennard, decidedly; "we are not savages."

"Very well, then, though p'r'aps you may feel different after you've had as much experience with 'em as I have," returned the trapper nonchalantly, leaving them and mounting his pony.

"Now we 'll ride on. I take it that it 's more 'n likely the Half Breed, who 's darin' enough to stop at nothin', will have tried to run the White Hoss Rapids."

"But it has never been done by human being."

"Well, that 's no reason it can't be did, if he 's got nerve an' skill enough to try it, which he sure has."

"No, I suppose not," assented the Captain.

"If he tried it, he either got through or he has n't. If he did n't git through we 'll find his body an' the girl's—" the old trapper noticed how white the Captain turned at this thought, and drew his own inferences; "they 'll either be floatin' in the shallows where the water broadens out below the rapids, or lyin' on the shore somewheres. If they did git through, the ground thereabouts is low an' soft an' we 'd ought to pick up the trail without much difficulty."

"I hope to God that if they tried it they did get through," said Kennard.

"Hold on, Cap'n," returned the old scout earnestly; "I don't know as I kin echo that there hope, or not. There 's wuss things than

'drowndin' in nice, clean water like the White Hoss Rapids, and—"

"Stop!" cried Kennard. "You think I don't know it as well as you? I can't bear it! Let us go ahead!"

Meekins nodded.

"You an' me better ride in advance an' let your men come on a little in the rear, so 's I can see any possible Injin sign hereabouts. Them dead bucks left a trail a baby could foller. They done it a purpose. They might have got away, for our hosses was nowheres near as fresh as theirs, if it had n't been for you, comin' up unexpected like. They must have been surprised when they seen you."

"They had little time for surprise," answered the soldier, "before we got them."

Thereafter with Kennard and the old scout riding ahead, the troops moved rapidly on. It was late in the afternoon when they struck the river just below the rapids. The old man had led them to the exact spot.

There, sure enough, was a trail. Meekins examined it cursorily from the back of his horse, and uttered one explosive monosyllable.

"Hell!"

"What's the matter?" asked Kennard, who had ridden down to the river's edge with him, the troopers halting a little space behind.

"Why, Sullivan's men have been here an' tromped all over the place."

"Well, can't we follow them?"

"Sure. You could do it in the dark with your eyes shet, but who's to know whether they've got the right trail."

"What's to be done, then?"

"Well, we'll see where they went," replied the scout, crossing the stream and examining the ground on the other side.

"They put for the mountains all right," he said, returning in a little space.

"I have been looking through the shallows," said Kennard, "and I see no signs of any bodies."

"Oh, they got through all right, I guess, some way. There was probably some kind o' sign here when Sullivan an' his men mussed it up."

"Where do you think we should go?" queried the Captain; "we are wasting time."

Naturally he was wild with excitement and anxiety to get on the trail again.

"Lemme think," said Meekins; "I don't guess it 's much use follerin' the trail of Sullivan's outfit. God only knows where they 'll bring up. They 're a splendid set of cowboys, but there ain't a trailer among 'em, an' any man tryin' to ketch the Half Breed an' whoever he had with him—an' I jedge he 's picked up with a band of Sioux—would have to foller after him out of the grass country an' among the rocks, where I could hardly pick up the trail myself."

"Are you going to give it up then?"

"Give it up! Not if I have to foller the girl into the heart of the hull Sioux nation, but I 'm tryin' to argufy out in my mind what 's best for us to do. It 's easy to see that they 've struck for the heart of the mountains. Now, them mountains is a tangle of wild valleys, an' hills, rivers, cañons, and holes, that no man on earth knows."

"Yes, yes, of course," said Kennard; "go on."

"I guess I know about as much about the country as any white man, an' most Injins. There 's some thousands of places where they could hide an' we 'd never stumble on 'em. Agin, there 's other places they 'd be likely to

go to that we could hit on. It's a big gamble, Cap'n. We're takin' big chances, but I've got an idea. I give it to you for what it is worth. You can take it or leave it. I'm goin' to foller it myself. I reckon Johnson and the other boys 'll go with me."

"What is it? Where are you going?"

"Well, I figger it out this way. The Half Breed won't be in command of the party, but he 'll have powerful influences over it. One of his favorite haunts is a certain shelf-like cave in a tremendous cañon that I know of. Access to it is only up a horrible rough an' narrer trail that one man could hold forever agin a regiment. I've hunted with him an' once we went there. Must have been ten years ago, but I know the place. I've got a fine memory for sich things, an' I got it fixed in my mind. If it's left to me, I says the chances are he 'll go there."

"Is it a cul-de-sac?"

"A what?" exploded the trapper.

"I mean is there any exit from it; any way out after you get in, except by the way you come?"

"Yes, there is. It 's more easy to git out of the place than to git in, although I follered the trail out. We stopped there one night, I remember. We was prospectin' an' we seen a likely lookin' outcropping ledge or two on the way up an' we went back the way we come in, so I don't know exactly what 's beyond. It would make a good restin' place, about a good day's journey even for an Injun, an' in fact about as much as they could stand, though they did push their hosses like they giner'ly does. It 'd be far from the ranch. Pretty safe from any pursuit, for Girot don't suspect I 'm within five hundred miles of this territory, an' he probably thinks no one else knows about it. 'Tain't much to build on, but it 's all I got. We got to go somewheres, an' that 's the most likely place I knows of. Now, what do you think?"

"I will go with you," returned Kennard promptly.

It was the best he could do. Chance of finding the fugitives in the labyrinth of the range was small at best, still, the old man's reasoning was good. Besides, they had to go somewhere. Inaction was unendurable. His men were

fresh and could stand a night march. As for himself, he could have gone on forever.

"All right," said Meekins; "we 'll take the hull troop as far as we can, an' then leave half of 'em at the mouth of the cañon with the hosses, an' make a dash with the rest of 'em on foot."

"How long is the trail after you reach the mouth of the cañon?"

"Well, three or four hours, I reckon. You can't make it in much less in sich a place as that at night. It 's about the wust trail I know in the range."

"Is n't it practicable for horses?"

"In daylight, yes, an' if you don't care how much noise you make, but goin' quiet like we got to go, better leave 'em behind."

"Very well," said the Captain.

They crossed the river, and when they did so caught sight of a broken birch bark canoe. Bud Meekins, after inspecting it, opined that the canoe had probably come through that day. Then desirous of making as much time as possible, and of getting to the mouth of the cañon before dark, conscious that a good rest for the

night awaited the horses, the command proceeded at a gallop until they struck the rough rocks of the foothills. Sullivan's trail, which was plain as daylight, they found branched off suddenly to the northward after progressing about a mile from the river bank.

"He 's seed somethin' or thinks he has," said Meekins, galloping by Kennard's side.

"And you don't think it would be wise to follow him?"

"Frankly, I don't, Cap'n. He 's got force enough to deal with 'em any way if he ketches 'em an' it 's more 'n likely he 's gone off on a fool's errand. It stands to reason that them Injins, or whoever they be, ain't goin' to linger around these foothills when they 've got a chance to lose theirselves in the range, an' that track don't lead nowhere. Leastwise, nowhere that I knows of. You might git to that little lake on Cloud Peak that way."

"That is my rendezvous with Colonel Wainwright to-morrow."

"Well, you can be sure them bucks did n 't go that way. Nope, I 'm still of the opinion that we 're doin' the best thing."

"I am trusting to you, Meekins," said the Captain wistfully.

"Well," returned Meekins, gravely, "you 'd better trust in somebody higher 'n me, but so fur as my intelleck goes, it is workin' in the gal's sarvice an' yourn. I take it 'tain't merely becus she 's a woman that you went white when I mentioned her back on the trail yonder," he ran on with the garrulous frankness of the old frontiersman.

"No," answered the Captain, equally unreserved. "That 's enough to make any man hunt her abductors, but it is not only that. I was going over to her father's this morning to ask her to be my wife."

"And what sez she about that?"

"I do not know," was the answer. "Sometimes I think I never shall know now."

"Well, Cap'n," returned the hunter, with ready sympathy, "it 's not so bad as if she was tuk by Injins alone. I know that hound of a Half Breed mighty well. I 've hunted with him, trapped with him an' prospected with him. He 's got some kind o' chivalry, some kind o' decent instinks in his hide; I reckon it's from

his French people of long ago. He 's as vain as a peacock, too. He thinks he 's irresistible, a reg'lar lady killer, you know, an' no woman kin help fallin' in love with him. He might think he 'd win the gal an' not force her. I 've got an idee that p'r'aps that 's it."

"I hope so," said Kennard, encouraged somewhat by the old scout's words. "I pray to God it may be so. It will make me kill him a little more mercifully than otherwise, if I find out that is true!"

CHAPTER XI

A PAIR OF LITTLE SHOES

IT was night when the troop finally drew rein and halted at the mouth of the trail which led into the mouth of the cañon. Before giving the order to dismount, Kennard briefly addressed his soldiers.

"Men," he said, "Meekins thinks it is possible that Miss Benham may have been carried up this pass to a certain secret camping spot frequented by Girot, of which he has knowledge. On the strength of his guess we have decided to try the trail, which he tells me, is the worst in the mountains, in the somewhat forlorn hope of finding and surprising the camp. It is a wild chance but I do not know where else to go or what else to do. The trail is impossible for horses at night. We will have to attempt it on foot. It means three hours or more of steady plodding, and either disappointment, or a hard fight at the end. One half of the troop will

stay here with the horses. Mr. Hamilton, you will remain in command. The other half will go with Meekins and me. Mr. Bodley, you will accompany us. Now I want all those who will volunteer to go to move forward."

As a matter of course, every man moved forward. They did not content themselves with that, for every man broke into appeals:

"Take me, sir."

"Don't leave me behind, sir."

Even Hamilton, although he knew, of course, what his duty was, joined in the clamor.

Kennard's face flushed with pride.

"I knew I could count on every one of you men," he said quickly. "I shall have to select you by lot. No, Hamilton, you are the senior officer after myself. The responsibility of the remainder of the troop must be yours."

He looked at the men crowding closely in line about him. The moonlight gave him a clear view of their intent, excited faces.

"I do not know how to make a choice among you," he said, looking from one to the other in some uncertainty. "Break ranks," he added suddenly.

The men broke the line instantly, but they crowded about him on their horses more closely than before in their eagerness.

"Now," he cried, "fall in again and form line. Any way, men; never mind your old order."

The men hastily crowded back in some sort of a line with sufficient variation in their position not to have duplicated their previous formation.

"That's well," continued the young Captain. "Attention! Count fours."

The sharp, staccato notes of the men as they called off the numbers in quick succession rang through the still night.

"The odd numbers will fall back one step," continued Kennard, when silence again supervened; "the even numbers will step forward one pace."

In a trice, as the command was obeyed, the little troop found itself divided into two platoons.

"Now," said Kennard, "I will spin a coin. If it's heads, the odd numbers go; if it's tails, the even numbers go."

While the men waited in great excitement

for the result of this frontier casting of lots, Kennard flipped the half dollar high in the air and caught it in his hand.

"Mr. Hamilton," he said, extending it, without looking at it himself, "what is it?"

"Heads," said Mr. Hamilton; "the odd numbers win."

"The odd numbers go, then," declared Kennard, but his voice was drowned by the cheers of those who were selected to go and by groans from those who were to be left behind.

"Make camp, Mr. Hamilton," said Kennard, as the tumult subsided; "choose a good position hereabouts, and one capable of defense. We don't know what other bands of Indians may be adrift in the foothills, and one detachment of the 12th Cavalry has already been cut to pieces. Keep good watch. If you don't hear from us by say, nine o'clock in the morning, make the best of your way to Lake Tear-in-the-Clouds on the slope of Cloud Peak. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"You know how to get there?"

"Well; not exactly, sir."

"If you foller our trail back to where Sulli-

van an' his crowd evidently branched off to the north'ard," said Meekins, "an' keep the range well on your left, keepin' out from the foothills, you 'd ought to strike that lake without much trouble. It 's the only sheet of water hereabouts, an' should lie fifteen miles or so to the north."

"Think you can find it now, Hamilton?"

"I am sure of it, sir."

"Very well. Now dismount the men. I will take Schneider with me and you can retain the other sergeants. The scouting party will turn their horses over to those who remain here. There will be a wait of ten minutes to get something to eat and to get ready. Every man will take his revolver, rifle and cartridge belt full of ammunition, leaving blanket rolls, and everything else behind. Don't kindle any fires. Lights can be seen a long distance. Get your bread and meat out of your haversacks."

The ten minutes which had been put to good advantage by every man was soon over. Under the advice of the frontiersman the party was arranged as follows: Meekins, and Kennard in the lead. After that, old Johnson and one

cowboy; then the troopers and the other two cowboys; with Schneider and Bodley, last of all bringing up the rear. The men were enjoined to make no noise, to hug the side of the mountain, and keep close together, taking every precaution possible to make no misstep which would throw them to certain death in the cañon.

In this order the little band plodded up the trail. It was weary work, after the long chase of the day just ended. But led by the indefatigable and tireless old trapper, and by the ardent and anxious young officer, they kept steadily at it for perhaps two hours and a half, the trail growing narrower and more difficult all the time as they approached its end. There had been no halts, but now as the men in the rear came crowding up, they found the head of the line had stopped.

"As I recalls it," whispered the trapper to the Captain, "the narrerest part of the trail should be yonder an' it swerves around a kind of a pint. When we pass that, we 're on a broad shelf of the mountain with room enough for a regiment. The watch'll be right there. This crowd could n't possibly approach him

without bein' seed over an' over agin. I propose that you fellers halts here an' lemme creep up on the lookout. Mebbe I kin git him, an' if I do, the rest will be easy. If I can't surprise him, I'll have to shoot him. There ain't no other way, an' then you all come on the jump. You 'd better move forrard to the precipice after I'm gone. That 'll be in easy reaching distance. An' for God 's sake, don't make no sound, whatsomever."

"Let me go with you," whispered Kennard eagerly.

"No," replied the frontiersman, promptly and positively, "two of us could n't possibly creep up on him; one of us might by keepin' in the shadder. I kin wait until he turns his back or p'r'aps nods, but two of us never could. Don't you be 'fraid; you'll have plenty to do in a moment."

"Very well, then," acquiesced Kennard, appreciating the full force of the other's cogent reasoning.

He shook him vigorously by the hand as he spoke.

"Good-by. I hope for good luck, for your

sake an' for the gal's," said the old trapper, stealing forward on the trail.

Kennard hastily explained the situation to the men, and the whole party moved cautiously forward to the place indicated by the trapper, and then awaited with beating hearts, every man keyed up to the highest pitch, every rifle ready for instant service. The shelf there was narrow, the walls receding backward a little. The men stood in line leaning against it, breathless with anxiety and anticipation.

As for Kennard, he felt that never in his life had he experienced such ghastly suspense as during that long wait. What could be keeping the trapper! They strained their heads to hear above the wind in the pine trees overhead and its long sigh down the cañon, the sound of a shriek or fall, a rifle shot, but nothing came. Finally, after a wait that seemed well nigh interminable, the form of the trapper appeared in the moonlight.

"Well!" exclaimed Kennard, in a low, tense whisper.

The trapper lifted his hand.

"There 's somethin' strange about the situation," he whispered in return. "There was an Injin lying at the promontory. I crep' up to him thinkin' he was asleep an' stabbed him, but he was dead, stone dead, sir, already! He 'd been stabbed afore! Then I crawled to the promontory an' looked around. The place is dark, but I could hear breathin'. They 're there all right. There 's jest a twinkle of glowin' ashes that showed me there 'd bin a fire. But how come that Injin dead, an' who killed him, I don't know."

"We 'll soon find out," answered Kennard promptly, his heart leaping at the chance for action at last. "Now we will go on."

"All right," assented the trapper, "jest as soon as you pass the promontory the shelf widens out. You 'd better tell your men to extend to the right until they reach the cliff wall as they come around, an' then advance forrard. The place is in deep shadder, but they kin go on in the general direction of the cañon, which they can see by the wanin' moon an' stars. Then there 'll be no danger of the fellers that comes last firin'

into the fellers goin' first. An' caution 'em, for God's sake, Cap'n Kennard, not to hit no female women either. You understand?"

"Perfectly," said Kennard, passing the orders back in whispers to his men.

"Now we are all ready," said Meekins.

"Yes," said the Captain decisively, "and this time I will go ahead."

He was a seasoned and experienced soldier in spite of his youth and had been in many campaigns and participated in many fights, but never had his heart beat as on this night when, pistol in hand, he stepped out on the trail and swiftly made for the promontory.

Now as luck would have it, between the inspection of the sleeping camp by the old trapper and his return to the troopers, the Half Breed had awakened. Feeling chilly, he uncovered the embers, piled some dry wood on the fire and rekindled a feeble blaze. Then he had risen to his feet, and following the shadow of the rock, he had stepped back to assure himself that his prisoner was still safe where she had been left. To that action he owed his life.

His movement and the kindling of the fire

had awakened some of the Indians. When Kennard rounded the promontory they were sitting up, one or two had already got to their feet. He could see them all vaguely in the flickering light. He stared at them a moment, seeking the figure of a woman and finding none. Then his eyes sought for the Half Breed, and missed him also. Inspection moments were instantly over, for the men, rifle in hand, came crowding around the promontory after him.

Old Yellow Foot quickest awoke to the situation. Firing from the hip with accuracy, his ball struck the man who at the moment of the discharge was turning the point. Whether he was mortally wounded or not, could never be told, however, for with a wild shriek he plunged over into the abyss and to certain death below.

Simultaneously with Yellow Foot's shot, Kennard opened fire with his heavy Colt, singling out the Chief for the first fatal bullet, and in the next instant the plateau was filled with flashes of light and the cañon with roaring sound. The Indians were caught at a terrible disadvantage. They were surprised in the first place; they were in the illumination of whatever light

there was, in the second. After a wild and scattering volley, they broke and fled. They were pursued by the excited troopers, and many of them were killed in the mad race up the broad trail through the black night, but several of them made good their escape, among them the Half Breed.

Foremost in the rapid forward rush of the men after them had been the Captain and the trapper. They had had a good view of the figures disappearing in the darkness and they were certain that no woman had been among them.

The bugler of the troop had been brought with the party, and seeing the folly of further pursuit in the darkness, at the suggestion of old Meekins, Kennard had the recall sounded.

The men came back in twos and threes, and meanwhile Kennard made the place resound with appeals.

"She may be hidin' in some crevice of the rocks," the trapper had said.

"Miss Benham! Amy! Where are you?" cried Kennard, listening in vain for an answer.

"Lights!" he commanded at last.

"There 's some wood left here," said the hunter, who had been peering about on his own account.

As he spoke, he threw an armful on the fire, which as the wood was dry, was soon blazing and crackling brilliantly. It gave them sufficient light to explore the whole shelf of the mountain and the recesses back of it. The trapper and Kennard conducted the search. They found nothing until they came to the spot where Amy and Mah-wissa had rested.

"There 's somethin' here," said Meekins, getting down on his knees to examine it.

"What is it?" asked Kennard, stooping over it.

"It 's a pair o' shoes, a white woman's slippers."

He held them up. Kennard snatched them eagerly.

"Do you know who they belong to?" asked the scout.

"Miss Benham's, to a moral certainty," was the answer. "I could swear to them."

"No Injin squaw ever wore them," said the trapper, examining one of the dainty little shoes. "They 're almost new, too. No one has ever

walked much in 'em, certainly not in this rough country."

"They are hers," said Kennard. "My God! where can she be, and where is that damned Half Breed?"

At this juncture Sergeant Schneider came up to them.

"Sir, to the Captain," he said, saluting.

"What is it, Sergeant?"

"I seed the Half Breed running up the trail, sir."

"Was he alone?"

"Alone, sir, and I fired at him."

"Did you get him?"

"I think not, sir."

"Did any of you see a woman, Miss Benham, men?" cried Kennard, turning to the troopers crowding between him and the fire.

"No, sir, we did n't see her."

"Have you examined the dead bodies?"

"Every one of them," was the answer.

"Yes," said the Sergeant, "they are all bucks and in war paint, sir."

"What has become of her? She must have been brought here!"

"Wait!" said the old trapper, "that dead Injin at the promontory. Could she have killed him an' gone back on the trail?"

"Impossible!"

"I guess you 're right, for, as I remembers it, there 's no way of gittin' off it except the way we come, an' if she 'd gone that away we 'd a met up with her or seen her sure."

Meekins was ignorant of the fact that a landslide sometime since had made that practicable descending place which Amy and Mah-wissa had used the night before, or his cunning intuition might have set him on the right trail of the poor fugitives.

"Some one must have killed that man an' started back on that trail," he mused. "If she did it she must have realized that there was no escape from it. She must have come back here an' passing the sleepin' camp fled to the uplands. We 'll find her there. That will be our best chance."

"But the shoes?"

"She took 'em off an' went in her stockin' feet to make no noise, an' left 'em here while she stole away from the ledge."

"That must be it," assented Kennard forlornly.

He had a fierce pang at the thought of this delicate woman barefooted in the rocky passes of the mountains. He could see her feet bruised, cut, bleeding—

"Yep," said the scout, "that must be the way of it, onless—"

He stopped and looked hard at Kennard.

"Unless, what?"

"I hate to say it," he said, "but there's another possibility that comes to my mind. She may have gone back there thinkin' to escape down the trail by which she come. She might have met that Injin so suddenly that he could n't give no alarm, an' then she may have fallen over the cliff, or—"

"What else?"

"It is quite possible her bein' the gal we both knows she is, she might have throw'd herself over when they got here."

"Don't say that," groaned Kennard.

"Would n't you rather have her over there than—"

"Yes, yes," said the soldier, "but I can not bear it. How shall we find out?"

"We can't do nothin' abut it but wait 'til mornin'. Either she 's over the cliffs or escaped to the uplands in some way, an'—"

At that moment distant shots rang out, far away on those uplands, beyond and over their heads.

CHAPTER XII

THE AVENGERS OF BLOOD

"MR. BODLEY," said Captain Kennard, as the rattle of shots continued for a few moments, and then died away, "take a dozen men and find out what is happening up on the bluffs. You had better mount some of the captured ponies. Schneider, go along with them. You, too, Meekins, if you will. Don't get into any trap or ambuscade, and report back here as soon as possible."

"Very good, sir," returned Bodley, saluting.

He selected his party at once, and in a few moments, mounted on the captured Indian ponies, of which there were a great number, and led by the old trapper, they trotted rapidly up the trail and disappeared in the darkness.

"Men," said Kennard, turning to the rest of the troopers, "examine these Indians and their traps and see if you can find some rope. Johnson," speaking to the cowboy, "will you and

your men also lend a hand. I want to see if I cannot find rope enough to go down the cliffs as soon as it gets light. Let me know," he cried, as the men disappeared, "if any of the Indians are alive."

"I 've already seen to that, Cap'n," said Johnson meaningly.

"Oh, you have!"

"Yep," answered Johnson, "they are all dead —now," he muttered.

Kennard turned away in disgust at the inference, and yet there was a certain relief, for a wounded Indian would greatly hamper their movements.

"Are any of the men hurt?" he called out.

"Neal went over the cliffs, sir," answered one man.

"I got a scratch along my cheek," said another.

"The rest of us are all right," answered the third, after a moment's pause.

"Let me see your cheek, Watson," continued Kennard, stepping toward the fire.

He examined it carefully and was greatly relieved to find it was nothing but a graze, a

random bullet having just touched the trooper.

"Wash it off at the spring, and I think you will be all right."

"Lord love you, Cap'n," returned Watson, "it 's nothing at all."

"We 've got plenty of rope here, Captain," said Corporal Murphy, the ranking non-commissioned officer present, "and if you want to go over the cliff, sir, I can rig you up a line. I was in the Navy once."

"Then get to work at it."

"Aye, aye, sir," was the answer.

Kennard stepped to the edge and looked down into the cañon. It was still dark, but he knew in a short time it would be light. He prayed for daylight and yet he was fearful as to what he might see when it would come.

As he stood staring and waiting, there was a sudden commotion at the head of the trail. The men on the shelf grasped their arms, but there was light enough after a few seconds to discover that it was Bodley's party returning. It seemed, however, twice or three times as big as when he went out, and as the ponies came trotting down the slope, Kennard saw riding by

the side of Bodley the gigantic form of Sullivan. He sprang forward to meet them.

"Sullivan, for God's sake! Miss Benham? Have you got her?"

"No," answered the cattleman, his disappointment as apparent as Kennard's at the announcement.

"That firing I heard?"

"We were in camp yonder when a bunch of Indians came running out of the darkness and almost fell over us. The man on watch fired and then we all jumped to our feet and blazed away in the darkness."

"Did you get any of them?"

"We got two of them, bucks, Sioux."

"Did you see any woman?"

"Not one of us. I saw the Half Breed and fired at him."

"Did you hit him?"

"Missed him, damn the luck."

"Then you are sure she was not with them."

"I am sure of nothing except that the Half Breed was alone, and none of us saw her. We were all on the lookout when Mr. Bodley came up with the soldiers. We mighty near fired

into him; sure would, had it not been for Meekins, who recognized us somehow or other."

"I can see in the dark," said Meekins, chuckling as he spoke, "as well as most people can see in the light."

"I believe it," said Sullivan. "And when we did recognize the troopers we thought surely you had got Miss Benham."

"She has been here," said Kennard.

"So, Mr. Bodley said, but where is she now?"

"God only knows! Perhaps over there."

He pointed down the cliff into the depths below.

"That's to be found out then," returned the cattleman, promptly; "I'll go down and see."

"Excuse me," answered the soldier, "that is my task. I have already got ropes ready."

He peered intently down into the gulf. He could see dark spots indicating perhaps bodies lying among the shadows of the rocks below. At least so he thought. Might she be one of them?

"I am going down now. It is light enough.

Your men are accustomed to handle ropes; will you take charge up here, Sullivan?"

"Sure," was the answer.

Murphy had rigged up a sort of a rude bo's'n's chair out of the largest piece of wood he could find. They rolled up some of the Indian blankets on the edge of the cañon to prevent the sharp rocks from cutting the strands, and under the leadership and direction of Sullivan, the rope in which the Captain was suspended was carefully payed out until its slackness indicated that he had reached the bottom.

To disentangle himself from the chair was the work of a moment. It was difficult moving in the deep shadow of the cañon, but with remarkable celerity considering all things, Kennard made his way from one body to another. There were five or six Indians, dead and frightfully crushed; the trooper who had been shot as he rounded the point, in like state, but nothing else. He wandered up and down the cañon for some distance. He satisfied himself that the stream was so far from the edge that no one could have jumped into it and been swept away.

With relief unspeakable, yet with a growing sense of desperate mystification, he decided that the body of the woman he loved was not there. If she had leaped from the cañon it must have been below or above the place of the camp. He fastened the body of the trooper on the rope, and after it was lifted up to the shelf, he himself mounted to his command.

"She is not there," he said. "There is no sign of her having fallen there. There were only six Indians and Trooper Neal."

"What 's to be done now?" asked Sullivan.

"I do not know," was the answer. "I am under orders. I have to meet Colonel Wainwright and the rest of the command at Tear Lake near Cloud Peak this morning."

"What 's become of the girl?" asked the cattleman. "Good God, I can't bear to think of it!"

Kennard could give no answer.

"Gents," said the old trapper, "she either went back on that trail or went forrard. If she went forrard, she was took by some one, and is probably now on her way to the Indian camp, wherever it be. If she went back, I think we 'd have seen her. She may have fell off the cliffs,

an' I 'm goin' back as soon as it 's light to examine the trail. You are apt to stay at the lake for a part of the day, ain't you?"

"I think very likely we shall be there until late in the afternoon," returned Kennard.

"Very well, I 'll take a spare pony and I 'll meet you there, or if not there, I 'll overtake you."

"That is well thought of," said the Captain. "Meanwhile," he turned to the cowboys, "you know the Indians are out. I presume the whole Sioux Nation, Brules, Minneconjous, Uncpapas, Dog Soldiers and all, will join the Oglalas and the Cheyennes. Crazy Horse and Roman Nose are known to be in the lead. We have serious work ahead of us. We shall need every man we can get. Do any of you wish to go with us?"

"They 'll all wish to go," said Sullivan, as a clamor of assent arose from the cowboys, "but they are in no condition now. This thing ain't going to be ended in a day. I suggest that they go back to the ranch, arrange with Mitchell, who 'll be in charge in my absence, to bury the old Colonel, and keep just enough men to stay

there to keep things running. Then the rest will outfit themselves for a campaign and join the troops wherever they may be. Johnson, you take them back."

"Ain't you goin', Sullivan?" asked Johnson.

"No; I am going on with Captain Kennard here."

"I know the Government will be glad of your services," said Kennard to the cowboys. "In fact, I heard Colonel Wainwright talking last night of orders he had received, in case of an outbreak, to enlist a company of civilian scouts. I should like to have you associated with me in case you decide to join."

"We would like to serve with you first rate," said Sullivan; "we know you."

"Thank you," said the Captain, "and as for you, Sullivan, I am glad to have you with me now."

"Better get yourselves ready, boys," said Sullivan, shaking the Captain's hand. "The sooner you hit the trail, the sooner you will catch up with us. I guess you can outfit me, Captain?"

"Certainly."

"Well, then, Johnson, you take the command of the party, and good-by."

He stepped forward as he spoke and shook hands with his faithful men.

"I hope to God you find the girl, Sullivan," said Johnson, who was the last one to approach. "Come on, men," he said, preparing to move off.

"You 'd better not take the trail back, but go home over the uplands, Johnson. We got diverted by a false sign, or else we would have been climbing up this trail the same as you," said Sullivan to the Captain.

"It is lucky in the end," answered Kennard, "for between us we got most of them. It will teach Crazy Horse a lesson."

"He 'll have to get a harder lesson than that," said Meekins. "I 'm for down the trail," he added as he turned away.

As he did so a peal of thunder followed by a flash of lightning rolled across the cañon and heavy drops of rain began to fall in the gray dawn.

Meekins paused by the promontory.

"This 'll wash out any sign that 's left," he

said disconsolately. "It makes it harder 'n ever."

"Shall you go back?" asked Kennard.

"Yes, on the chance that she might be"—he paused—"dead in the cañon."

The Captain almost prayed that the scout's supposition was true. The old man shook hands and said good-by. With the same homely words of the cowboy a moment since he prayed that everything might be all right with the girl ere he turned and moved toward the fateful promontory in the now heavy and persistent downfall of rain.

"We might as well get the men ready to move out, Mr. Bodley," said Kennard, after watching the scout until he was lost to view behind the jutting rocks. "I guess we 've captured enough ponies to mount us all. Let me know when everything is in shape to start."

He turned away and walked back toward the recess where the shoes had been found. Sullivan found him there.

"God! Captain," he cried, "do you think we 'll find her?"

"I don't know."

"And if we do—what then?"

"Sullivan," asked Kennard suddenly, now that they were withdrawn from the immediate vicinity of the others, and were somewhat sheltered from the downpour by the overhanging rocks, "what is she to you?"

"Why, I have known her ever since she was a child," answered the other, astonished and disconcerted by the suddenness of the Captain's question.

"Is that all?" persisted the soldier.

"No, by God!" burst out the cattleman, "I love her. I wanted to make her my wife."

"Did she accept you? Forgive the directness of the question. But I, too, love her, and I wanted her to be my wife."

"You!" exclaimed the cattleman, aghast.

"Yes."

"Did she ever promise you?" asked Sullivan in his turn.

"I never said a word to her about it. Did you?"

"No."

The two men stared at each other in silence for a little space.

"You are a man, all right, Captain," said the ranchman at last. "If she chooses you there won't be any kick coming from me."

"And I can say the same, Sullivan."

Two hands extended and two hands met.

"Meanwhile," continued the cattleman, "we have got to find her."

"Yes," said the Captain, "but you are free; you can search for her as you like. I am a soldier. I have to do my duty and obey orders and go where I am sent."

"I hope to God, Captain, that you are sent after her!"

"So do I!"

"The platoon is ready to start, sir," said Bodley, coming up and saluting.

"Very good. Come, Sullivan."

Followed by the big ranchman, Kennard rode to the head.

"Forward! March!" he said grimly, putting his horse to the trail.

The hardest thing for humanity to sustain is the crushing sense of impotence, the consciousness of helplessness when the fate of one beloved is in the balance. There was hardly a

chance in the world that they could save Amy Benham. They knew her well enough to be sure that she would probably die by her own hand before they could reach her and that death would be welcome to her. They had one duty, however. If they could not find her, they could find him, and with black, desperate anxiety in their hearts, the two avengers of blood rode on.

CHAPTER XIII

PITCHED BATTLE IN THE HILLS

FOR two days the regiment, with the exception of the melancholy troop left behind at Fort McCullough, had been rapidly marching northward from that post. After the rendezvous at Lake Tear-in-the-Clouds, where a halt of a day had enabled the remaining troops of the regiment to join the headquarters, Colonel Wainwright, for the first time since the Civil War, found himself with a full command. The nine troops, comprising with teamsters and other auxiliaries nearly six hundred men, had moved northward to join General Crook, who was somewhere on the Wyoming-Montana border with the main army.

Chief Washakie, a splendid specimen of savage, the head of the war-like Shoshones, with a number of his braves who were loyal to the United States, had joined the marching column. So, too, had old Meekins, who de-

clared that he had followed the trail down the cañon carefully back to the place of the first camp without discovering a sign of the missing girl, although, as he admitted, the hard rain practically obliterated any indications that might have been left had she passed over it.

Miss Benham had disappeared as completely as if the earth had opened and swallowed her. There were but two evidences of her presence left, two little slippers, one of which Kennard with an unusual magnanimity had given to the cattleman, while he kept the other himself in the pocket of his hunting shirt under his blouse. That little shoe and a growing hope and an ardent prayer for vengeance were all that were left to her lovers. Both Sullivan and the young soldier had resigned themselves to her death. Indeed, in their hearts, they prayed that death might have been the least thing meted out to her.

The whole regiment, except veterans like the Colonel, rather looked upon the present campaign as something in the nature of a mere military promenade, a summer excursion into the unknown, with some interesting skirmishing at

the end of it. But some of the older officers, including the commander of the regiment, had met Crazy Horse and Roman Nose before. They knew that at any moment they were likely to find themselves confronted with the stiffest kind of a proposition in the way of battle. Indeed, General Crook himself was on the move with the main army, and they were not quite sure where he was. Good generalship would indicate that the proper maneuver for the great War Chief of the Sioux would be to fall on this advancing cavalry column in heavy force, either with the main body or with a formidable detachment, and cut it to pieces before it could effect a conjuncture with the main body. Crazy Horse was sufficiently capable a general to understand this, and Colonel Wainwright, especially as he got nearer the enemy's country, fully expected to be attacked in force. Consequently the march became slower and was conducted with more and more circumspection.

After leaving the lake, the command had proceeded along the east flank of the range, expecting to dash through some convenient pass and perhaps find the Indians on the other side.

There were known to be large villages on the hither side and Crook was believed to be operating in the upland country on the western side of the range.

On the third morning after departure, just after reveille, and before the men were fully dressed, some wide-awake Shoshones, who had been scouting ahead, came galloping madly back, giving the alarm. The camp of the night before had been pitched in a valley near a river. The ground rose to the front in successive ridges until it reached a high plateau perhaps a mile away. The river, beside which they had rested, sprang sharply from a wide and deep ravine, or cañon, off to the right, which cut through the ridges rising before them, and probably penetrated far into the mountains.

The alert Shoshones, fortunately, had given sufficient warning of the approach of the Sioux to enable the troopers to dress hastily and mount and deploy. Kennard's troop was held in reserve. The others occupied the ridges, three in number, in long successive lines; and long, thin, extended lines they were, too. The troopers of the first line dismounted and took what cover

they could find. The others remained in readiness for orders to advance.

The Indians were led by a tall, magnificent-looking Cheyenne, whom Meekins, who had gone out with the first line, recognized as Roman Nose, Crazy Horse's right-hand man and the Chief of the warlike sept of Cheyennes allied with the Sioux. Many of the officers also knew the Chief, for he had been prominent in various meetings which had been held in the year previous, looking toward the securing of a lasting peace. He was second only to Crazy Horse himself in military ability and not at all behind him in personal prowess, haughty courage and in the power of enthusing his men.

Riding rapidly along the front of the line on their ponies, and taking cover by hanging on the side farthest away from the soldiers, upon whom they poured a hurried and ineffectual fire, the Indians by a series of circling maneuvers and hideous yelling, sought to disconcert the line. Several riderless horses and several dead Indians, however, after a time convinced Roman Nose of the futility of these tactics; and, wonderful to say, for the practice

had been almost unknown heretofore, at a given signal, the whole circling mass suddenly turned, swung into line, poured a volley from their Winchesters at close range into the faces of the soldiers, and then galloped straight at the long, thin line in blue. At the same moment another body, taking advantage of the lateral ravine which cut through the ridges, suddenly appeared on the left flank of the white men.

The attack had been brilliantly planned. It was dashingly carried out. The soldiers delivered a sharp volley, but their position was plainly untenable. They fell back fighting. In some instances, the fighting was actually hand to hand. The troops were hard pressed and lost many men. A counter charge, gallantly delivered by Washakie and his Shoshones on the Cheyenne left, alone enabled the soldiery to make good their retreat. They halted after they passed through the second line and re-formed in its rear and the engagement at once became general. There was good cover at the top of the ridge. The Indians dismounted and occupied this. The range was short, and even such poor marksmen as the Sioux and Cheyennes proved

themselves to be, succeeded at times in hitting a soldier.

Colonel Wainwright, with his staff, sat on his horse back of the third line and easily within range of Indian bullets which sung around him. He anxiously surveyed the scene.

"How many of them are there, do you think?" he asked Kennard, commanding the reserve troop, who shared his chief's anxiety as he watched the hotly contested battle.

"I should think there were at least three thousand of them."

"Even with our two hundred and fifty Shoshones, who seem to be doing gallant work," observed old Colonel Wainwright, thoughtfully, "they outnumber us about four to one."

"Yes, sir."

"I never saw them come on so recklessly either."

"It is new to me, sir," replied Kennard.

"Mr. Geikie," said the Colonel to a young second lieutenant, who urged his horse quickly to the side of the Colonel and saluted, "tell Major Nash, who has command of the third line, to move his men up to the support of the

second line. Tell him to send B Troop off to the left and re-fuse his line to prevent any more flank attacks down that ravine."

The lieutenant saluted and galloped off like the wind.

"Captain Kennard—" the Colonel turned and glanced at the commander of his little reserve, "they don't give back an inch."

"No, sir."

"Look at that!" cried the old officer; "Knowlton is charging!"

At that moment, the Lieutenant Colonel, who had command of the first line, having got his men in shape and mounted them, galloped up the hill straight at the Indians, the men and their commander burning to wipe out the stigma of their forced retreat. The charge was of some force and effect, for the Indian line bent back like a drawn bow, and the pressure upon the second line of soldiers was immediately relieved; but now, from all sides of the savage crescent, a tremendous fire was poured upon Knowlton's column. It was no part of the Lieutenant Colonel's plan to do more than effect the relief, which he had done. Taking advan-

tage of the smoke of a heavy volley, therefore, he wheeled about and rejoined the second and third lines again. The ground was dotted with Indian slain, and there were a number of troopers lying here and there as well. And not one of them could well be spared.

"Well done!" exclaimed the Colonel in mingled triumph and relief; "that will teach them a lesson, but it was at some cost."

He looked anxiously off to the left. Another attempt had been made to flank the line, but his forethought in sending B Troop to that point was now apparent, and the attack was repulsed by the gallant advance of the troop.

The whole plateau was now ringing with sound and covered with smoke. Above the rattle of the firearms rose the wild and terrifying yells of the Sioux and the Cheyennes, and at intervals a cheer from the troopers, although in the main they fought in silence. Although the numbers engaged were small, the whole affair exhibited all the characteristics of a great battle. There were attacks and counter-attacks, threats, feints, charges and so on.

"Captain Kennard, I am afraid I shall have to

send you in," at last said the Colonel anxiously. "The Indians are holding their own; this has got to be ended."

The Colonel had with him, in addition to Kennard's troop, the best troop in the regiment, a hastily organized, ill sorted, variously armed force of mule packers, teamsters, civilian attachés, and employees of the wagon train. They were all brave men, experienced in frontier fighting, but they were not regular soldiers. When Kennard's troop went in, these would be his last and only reserve. The fight rapidly assumed more and more the proportions of a hotly contested battle. The Indians were better armed than the soldiers and they seemed to have a limitless supply of ammunition.

"We are very anxious to go in, sir," said Kennard, looking back at his men. "We should like nothing better than a chance at them!"

"I know, I know," said the Colonel. "Here comes Geikie. What is it, Mr. Geikie?" he cried, as the young officer came at a gallop.

"Colonel Knowlton says he can hold them now, sir! He thinks they have shot their bolt," he cried breathlessly.

"Good!" said the Colonel with deep satisfaction. "Now we can finish them up. Mr. Kennard, do you see that cañon off on the right flank?"

"Yes, sir."

"Take your men down that, and at the first convenient place swing them off by the left to the plateau and we will see if we cannot take these fellows in rear and in reverse. I will keep them busy here. Wait! You men go forward to that little knoll yonder—" the Colonel turned to the men of the wagon train. "Occupy it, open fire, and when Captain Kennard has passed, you fall back here. That will create a diversion, I think, Kennard, and perhaps you can slip through in the smoke and get into the cañon without being noticed. At any rate, it is our only chance. Don't go too far, and keep your men well in hand. Just as soon as I hear firing on the right, I will order a general advance and we will double them up between us. You understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Go ahead then."

CHAPTER XIV

THE MUTINY IN THE PASS

KENNARD saluted and turned to his men. They heard all that had been said and they knew exactly what was expected of them. Chafing at their previous inaction, they were ready and eager for the command to march.

The troop, which was already in line, at the word broke into column and trotted off to the right. Meanwhile the teamsters and others with Meekins leading them had already ridden tumultuously to the knoll, which covered the mouth of the cañon, and opened a tremendous fire on the Indians opposite. Under cover of the smoke Kennard's troop plunged into the cañon, whose mouth was very narrow, and was immediately lost to view.

With the soldiers by the side of Kennard, rode Sullivan. So soon as the troopers found themselves within the cañon the roar of the battle died away, the noise of it passed over their

heads, and as they rode along the rather easy trail, they soon lost it altogether.

The cañon was of the box variety. Its sides almost perpendicular, afforded no exit to the upper country on either hand. Its bottom had been washed out by the torrent which was at present existing only in the shape of a trickling rill off to the left. The going was easy, and the command moved forward at a sharp trot, eagerly looking for a way out to the upland to the left.

They had progressed for more than half a mile without finding any practicable lateral trail for the horses, and perhaps not even for an unmounted man. Kennard, who rode in the advance, was beginning to get a little anxious. The cañon twisted and wound among the hills as it plunged farther and farther into the range. It grew narrower, too, and the trail became obstructed with gigantic bowlders. The way became more difficult and the advance was made with more and more circumspection. Finally at a point where the cañon took a sharp bend to the right, the troop was halted. Schneider

and one of the veterans of the company were sent forward to see what they could discover.

It was as still as death in the depths of the great rift in the mountains save for the uneasy movements of the tired horses, the jingle of bits and accouterments, and a whispered word now and then passed between some of the men.

Off to the left across the stream the wall, which was everywhere else so monotonously perpendicular, happened to be badly broken. Kennard surveyed the place carefully while they waited.

"Horses might get up there, I think," he said, after a long, close inspection.

"Yes, it is possible," admitted Sullivan.

"It would be hard scrambling for them, sir," remarked Lieutenant Hamilton, who had just joined them.

"Still, it is the first place I have seen which would enable us to carry out the Colonel's orders," said the Captain. "I wonder how the battle goes back yonder?"

"We can tell nothing about that," answered Sullivan. "This cañon has twisted and turned

so much since we got in it, that we can't even tell where the fight was."

"We will soon see if we get on the uplands."

"Yes."

"I wonder what is ahead of us?" queried the Captain thoughtfully—then with quick decision —"Mr. Hamilton!"

The Lieutenant saluted.

"Ride to the bend of the cañon and see if you can get sight of Schneider."

The Lieutenant picked his way gingerly over the rough stones until he too disappeared around the bend after the other two.

"The villages of that crowd we're fighting ought to lie somewhere around these parts," said Sullivan.

"Yes; I wonder if she is in one of them!"

"I wonder," answered the big cattleman, gloomily and with sad foreboding.

And both were silent. Presently Hamilton came back with Schneider and the trooper at his heels. They came rapidly and in great excitement.

"There is a village a half mile beyond the point," began Hamilton so soon as he was near.

"Schneider went far enough to get a good sight of it. He saw a bunch of—"

Here Schneider came up and saluted.

"What did you make of it, Sergeant?" asked Kennard.

"It is a good-sized village, sir. I saw forty or fifty tepees."

"Any men?"

"No, sir. Women and children only."

"Kennard!" cried the cattleman, seizing the Captain by the arm, "she will be there! Let us jump the village!"

"No," said Kennard, simply.

"Good God, man, you don't mean to hesitate with such a chance as this!"

"My orders," began the Captain, saluting.

"To hell with your orders!" roared the cattleman furiously. "I tell you the girl is there. I feel it. Those bucks are all at the front fighting the rest of the regiment. We 've got the chance of our lives here to smash up the whole business and get back the girl."

"It may be as you say," returned the Captain, who had grown as pale as death, "but I have positive orders to—"

"But I tell you if the Colonel was here he would say go on. Am I not right, men?"

The big cattleman turned and addressed the troopers crowding close behind. It was easy to see where their desires lay, for a deep-voiced affirmative arose from the majority.

"Silence in the ranks!" cried Kennard imperiously, his face flushing with indignation at this monstrous breach of discipline. "By heavens! the first man that raises his voice again—" He turned toward them, pistol in hand, with a threatening gesture. "I understand the opportunity as well as you do, Sullivan, and I would give my life to go on."

"Why don't you go on then?"

"Because I have orders to do a certain thing, and this is the only place it can be done."

"And because of your damn fool orders, are you going to leave that girl to the fate that awaits her?" he sneered insultingly. "You call yourself a man!"

He pushed his horse threateningly close to the other as he spoke.

"I call myself a soldier," answered Kennard,

returning stare with stare and not giving back an inch. "I have got orders to obey and I am going to obey them."

"Well, I have got no orders and I am not going to obey you or any man!" cried the rancher with passionate vehemence.

"You are your own master, fortunately for you," returned Kennard coldly enough, although the fires were burning in his heart.

"I am going to get that poor girl out of hell, too; thank God, I am! And I am not going to do it alone either. Men!" he cried to the excited troopers, "are you going to leave that woman to her fate? Who will volunteer to ride through that village with me? If ten men will go, I will."

"Sullivan!" cried Kennard, as the men in obedience to a sudden, irresistible impulse surged forward, "if you say another word to my men, by the living God, I will shoot you where you sit your horse! I would do it now if we did not love the same woman. Get back, men!" he cried, keeping Sullivan still covered with his revolver; "get back!"

"Fall in ranks," shouted Hamilton and Bodley, whipping out their own revolvers, and confronting the disorganized men.

"I am with you, Captain," said Schneider, the old Sergeant, presenting his own rifle at the men of the troop he was accustomed to call his children.

"What the hell do we care for orders when the girl 's in question!" cried a young trooper, the newest recruit of the lot, hardly yet broken to the stern, self-sacrificing obedience of the soldier. "I 'm going with the cowboy. Who 's with me?"

He happened to be the left file of the first four. As he spoke he fearlessly struck spurs to his horse. The whole troop in mad excitement seemed about to follow the leader. In an instant, Kennard was by his side. Clutching his revolver by the barrel, he struck the man heavily on the side of the head. He reeled and would have fallen senseless from his horse had not the Sergeant caught him. The next instant Kennard had reversed his weapon and confronted the troop.

"You call yourselves soldiers!" he cried in bit-

ter scorn, in which shame for them was mingled. "As there is a God above me, I will let daylight through the whole troop if you don't instantly come to a halt and attention." He stared hard for a moment at the flushed, excited faces, confronting them with iron resolution and determination. "Sergeant," he continued, as the men slowly subsided, "fasten that damned mutineer on his horse. He is n't dead yet, although he deserves to be. Men, I yield to no one in my respect for and devotion to Miss Benham. I would have made her my wife. I would like nothing better than to lead you through that village, but it can't be done. I have orders which must be obeyed. Sullivan, you are not a soldier, you can do as you please, but no more speeches to my men, at your peril. Here I am in command."

By this time Sullivan's weapon covered the Captain.

"Before you could open your mouth again," he said, "you would be a dead man."

"And then the men of this troop would tear you to pieces, by God!" burst out old Schneider furiously. "I 'm ashamed of them; they are

cowboys, not soldiers," went on the veteran; "but they 'd do that much for the Captain."

"Right, Schneider," cried Hamilton.

"Count me in on that game," hotly seconded Bodley.

A deep, hoarse, ominous murmur rose from the ranks of the now thoroughly ashamed men, as the Sergeant ceased speaking.

Sullivan laughed contemptuously.

"You 're a damned fine lot," he said scornfully; "I 'll go alone."

"Don't be a fool, Sullivan," said Kennard, taking up the conversation.

"Rather a fool than a blue-coated, gold-braided coward!" sneered the cattleman, turning away.

At this fearful insult, Kennard made a convulsive movement toward Sullivan, while the troopers groaned and surged forward as if to get at the man who so foully aspersed them in the person of their captain. It was the old Sergeant who steadied them.

"Think of the men, Captain," said Hamilton quickly, laying his hand on his superior's pistol. "You can do nothing, now, sir."

"Yes, the men," said Kennard hoarsely, mastering himself; "I will settle with him later."

Meanwhile, there was a clatter of hoofs far down the cañon. A horseman was approaching at the best speed possible over such broken ground. Kennard rode to one side and stared at him. He was waving his hat. A short distance behind another followed him.

The first was Geikie, the Colonel's aide; the second was a trooper.

"Captain Kennard!" cried Geikie, as he drew nearer. "Thank God! I have reached you in time. The main force of hostiles has withdrawn from our front. Colonel Wainwright fears they have set a trap for you. You are to come back down the cañon as quick as possible. He is advancing up the right side to cover your retreat. You understand?"

"Perfectly," said Kennard.

He turned with a sharp command. The fours swung about on their horses where they stood. There was no time for turning the whole column, and instantly began the backward march. They did not go without comment. For Sullivan, furiously angry, his fight-

ing Irish blood up, called out to them, mingling mockeries and jeers and heaping curses upon them, as they trotted away down the cañon. There was not a man among them who would not gladly have killed him, save the wretched, half-conscious, helpless mutineer tied to his saddle.

They were not to make the return journey unhindered, for about half way down, the bluff on the opposite side suddenly blazed with fire. The Indians were there in force. The forethought of the Colonel, however, had despatched a strong relieving force up on the right side of the cañon. They arrived most opportunely, just as the Cheyennes opened fire, and an answering volley swept across the cañon, driving the Indians from the brink of it.

Under cover of this fire Kennard managed to get his men out of the death trap, although not without serious loss. Lieutenant Colonel Knowlton, who commanded the relief, fell back with him, the Indians following; and by mid-afternoon, after a long day of hard fighting, the troops went into camp on the very spot they had held in the morning.

It was at best but a drawn battle. The Indian loss had really greatly exceeded that of the soldiers, although proportionately it was not serious on account of their overwhelming numbers. Tactically the advantage remained with the Indians, for Wainwright's advance was stopped. He did not dare with his small force to proceed further. In fact, toward nightfall he withdrew to the southward, some miles from the battle field, and there established himself in a good defensive position.

So soon as his duties permitted, Kennard sought an interview with his commander. In bitterness of heart, he related all that had occurred in the cañon. He had been proud to be a soldier and now he hated the position. He had been stopped right at the moment when a bold dash might have enabled him to snatch the woman he loved from her tortures. And to add to his misery, his men whom he loved and trusted had all but mutinied and overridden him!

The cattleman, who also loved her, had branded him as a coward in the face of those very men, and had gone on to attempt alone the heroic undertaking of her rescue. His troop

had failed him in the crucial moment. He had checked their mutiny at the peril of his life in the nick of time. But that they had for a moment got out of his hands, cut him to the heart. He had been so proud of them.

"I tell you, Colonel Wainwright," said Kennard, passionately, as all these things were related to the commander, "I am on the verge of resigning my commission!"

"Kennard," said the old officer, who had known the other since he was a boy, "I understand how you feel. You love the girl. I can sympathize with you there. I can enter into all your shame about the troop, too—they shall suffer for it!—but you had no assurance that she was there in the first place, and in the second place, if you had gone on, you can see now that your command would have been cut to pieces."

"Yes, I suppose so," muttered the young man hoarsely.

"It was your obedience as a soldier that saved you," the Colonel urged. "You have your men to think of, and disgracefully as they behaved they are still soldiers. You represent the

United States, whose claim upon you is higher than that of any man or any woman. As it was, you were lucky to get out with a single man alive. It was a narrow escape. My fault to have sent you there; I realized it almost as soon as you had gone, and as the Indian firing in front gradually slackened, I determined to recall you and to send Knowlton. I am thankful to God, I did."

"But, sir," said Kennard, "I can't get away from the fact that she was there. She must have been there. Where else on God's earth can she be! and he has gone to save her after branding me as a coward in the front of my own men. Good God! Give me one chance!"

"You know you are not a coward, Kennard. We know that it took more courage to obey your orders than it did to follow Sullivan and I will give you a chance. A courier came in saying that those cowboys have been organized into a company of scouts. Those that belong to the Benham ranch that you sent back. They are to report here to-night. They want a captain. I will give you charge of them, if they will take you. Hamilton can handle your troop now,

and besides they need a rest after being so cut up to-day."

"Good, good!" exclaimed Kennard as the Colonel paused.

"We do not know where Roman Nose has gone, probably off to the westward. He has to be located," returned the old officer; "word has to be got to Crook. A courier from the Department Commander directs me to remain where I am until reinforced by the Ninth Cavalry, which is on the march. Then we are to go forward. Meanwhile you can go out on the scout. Find Roman Nose, find Crazy Horse. Get word to Crook where we are, and of the check we have sustained, and perhaps you can get trace of the woman."

"I 'll do it, sir; I 'll do it!"

"We shall be here for three days at least. It will take that time for the Ninth Cavalry to join us, and you can always find us if it is necessary," continued the Colonel. "If we are not here it will be because we have moved back to Tear Lake. In fact, I think I shall move there to-morrow or at least in that direction. It is as easy to strike across the range from there as

here, and the Indians after this encounter will certainly have gone to the other side. I suspect that Crazy Horse detached Roman Nose to check us and will now be massing on Crook. Well, he has enough men to hold his own, and anyway I have no option but to remain hereabouts. You understand?"

"Yes, sir, and I thank God for the chance you give me!"

"Go," said the Colonel, "and get some rest. These men will be tired out after their all day's ride. When they come in I 'll have you called. You can take them out about four o'clock in the morning."

"And Sullivan?"

"He has made his own bed. He will have to lie in it," said the Colonel; "at least we can do nothing for him."

"He is a brave man," responded Kennard magnanimously, "even if he did call me a coward."

CHAPTER XV.

IN THE WIGWAM

SULLIVAN was hot tempered and impulsive, but at heart he was both generous and just. He stared blankly after the retreating soldiers until a turn in the cañon hid them from his sight. His resentment grew less with each passing moment, and before they were completely out of view, if he had enjoyed the power, he would have called back to them some sort of an apology for his bitter stigmatism of their courage and conduct. By the time he had reached that frame of mind, however, it was too late. Resolving in his heart that so soon as he could do so he would make proper explanation and amendment, he addressed himself to the business in hand.

He did not propose to do anything rash or impetuous. If the troop had been with him he would have suggested a bold dash on the village, now that its natural defenders were away; then,

a thorough search of it for the girl, whom he had no doubt would be found in one of the tepees, and then a ride back for freedom. Alone he could do nothing that way.

It was now about mid-day. Whatever he could accomplish single-handed, would have to be done under cover of darkness. Meanwhile, it was necessary for him to seek some place of concealment. The seamed and rugged cañon afforded numerous spots where he could lie hidden, but they were not suitable for his further purpose, which was a place whence unobserved he could have the village in view.

Schneider and the others had said that it was in sight a short distance beyond. He dismounted, stripped his horse of saddle, bridle and equipments, which he carefully concealed, and turned the pony loose, driving him back down the cañon after the others. Examining most carefully his weapons, he started cautiously forward, keeping a bright lookout in every direction.

He had proceeded but a little distance when he heard faint and far down the cañon the sound of firing. He realized, of course, what had

happened. He had sense enough to see that if the troop had gone on as he had suggested they would have all been caught in a trap, whence they would have been unable to extricate themselves. They would all have been cut to pieces.

He had some anxiety, indeed, for the troop as it was, but there was nothing he could do, and summoning what philosophy he had, he walked cautiously toward the village. He realized that in one thing the encounter below in the cañon gave him an additional advantage, for every brave capable of firing a gun would be withdrawn from the village to take part in the ambush. If only he had been unobserved, all would be well with him. There was no evidence that any one had seen him either.

The cañon was very crooked, and he was greatly astonished, on turning a sharp bend, to find himself suddenly confronted by a full-grown Indian in his war gear. The left arm of the savage hung helpless. There was a dirty bandage tied around it, such as the rude fingers of some unskilled squaw might have made. If he had time to think, Sullivan might have guessed that here was one of the war party that had been

cut to pieces on the ledge a few days before, who had not got off scatheless, and who was now coming down the cañon to be in at what he would naturally suppose would be the death of the troop. In his right hand the warrior carried a Winchester.

For a second the white man and the red man stared fixedly at each other. Which was the more surprised it would be difficult to say. The white man, through keenly attuned nerves, thought a trifle more quickly than the other and first awoke to action. Just as the Indian raised his right hand intending to fire his Winchester as best he could with one arm, Sullivan sprang upon him. The gun flew from the Indian's hand and fell on the rocks some distance away. Fortunately it did not explode.

With wonderful dexterity the Indian drew a knife hanging at his belt and cut viciously at the rancher, who had grabbed him with both hands by the throat to prevent an outcry. The two were stumbling about over the rocks else the knife thrust might have got home in the white man's body. As it was, it did inflict a wound, which would after a while prove troublesome,

but which in the heat of the conflict only served to madden the man.

The unfortunate Indian had no chance to repeat the blow, the pressure on his throttle was so terrible, so much greater, indeed, than Sullivan realized, that the knife fell from his nerveless hand. The Indian turned black in the face, Sullivan shaking him as a terrier a rat. As the Indian's muscles relaxed, they both slipped and fell. Still clutching him tenaciously, the two plunged to the ground, the red man underneath. When Sullivan finally released his grip he saw that the Indian was dead, either by choking or by breaking his back when he fell, or in whatever way it might be. At any rate his troubles were over.

It was easy to conceal him in one of the crannies of the rocks and roll a few bowlders down upon him, so that unless the search for him was careful he would not be observed.

Before thus disposing of the body, however, the ranchman slipped off the clothing of the dead man, which consisted of a beautifully embroidered buckskin shirt, fringed buckskin leggings, a magnificent war bonnet, and the

other accouterments of a warrior of the first rank.

A plan had already formed itself in his mind, to the furtherance of which this savage panoply would greatly conduce. Possessing himself also of the Indian's weapons, including the knife which had cut him in the side, and first taking the precaution to bind up as well as he could his wound—ugly looking but not serious—Sullivan went forward again. This time with more caution than ever.

Finally he reached a place whence he could observe the Indian camp. The cañon widened out into a wooded valley. The village was pitched on one side of the stream, the same that flowed through the cañon. Fortune now favored the rancher again, for a short distance away in the side of the cliff he observed a deep depression over which the rock wall extended in a huge overhang. This niche, or recess, was sufficiently scored out of the wall, he found when he climbed up to it, to afford a man lying down concealment from observation either from above or below.

Filling the canteen which Kennard had given

him at the brook, and making sure that he was not observed, he cautiously climbed up to the rock, and sank down in the hollow or recess which perfectly concealed him. Through a crevice he could see all that went on in the Indian camp.

All through the long afternoon he lay there watching. There was the usual bustle and movement in the camp. Herds of ponies, of which the Indians seemed to have uncountable supply, grazed on the meadow beyond. Near a clump of trees squaws were busy about fires preparing an evening meal. Children ran to and fro and played at mimic warfare. Dogs snarling and barking wandered unmolested among the tepees. The scene was all peaceful, the encampment undisturbed. The Indian women were evidently confident that their men would keep off the soldiers and they went about their ordinary occupations with great indifference.

The ranchman was keen sighted and he scrutinized with utmost care every moving figure. His heart beat high with anticipation and hope that one of them might be Amy Benham. He

was still a long distance from the camp, but as the hours wore away, he became quite certain that none of the women in view were white. If she were there she must be a prisoner in one of the tepees, a thing not in itself unlikely. The possibility was so real that he resolved not to abandon his design without making sure at any cost.

Late in the afternoon the camp was aroused to great excitement by the return of the band of warriors to which it belonged. They crossed the brook between the mouth of the cañon and the camp itself, and Sullivan had a near view of them.

They were talking and gesticulating eagerly, evidently about the battle which had just been fought. The watcher caught words now and then which indicated the subject of their conversation and he listened intently, striving to make out what the results of the encounter had been. He saw no prisoners, and but few scalps were waved triumphantly aloft. On the other hand, there were many wounded Indians, and he inferred from this that they had been hardly dealt with. Yet they seemed to be in remarkably

good spirits notwithstanding their losses. The troopers must have been driven back, but at least they had not been massacred. Kennard's troop had evidently not been cut to pieces. Sullivan heaved a sign of relief when he came to this conclusion. His conduct toward them worried him the more he thought of it.

He studied the Indians the more intently in the hope of getting some clue from their remarks, when suddenly the Half Breed, the center of another group, sprang into his line of vision. Instantly the rancher clutched the rifle that lay by his side. He could easily have killed the Half Breed. The distance was not great for so good a shot as he, and his whole soul urged him to shoot down the villain without mercy. Second thoughts, however, restrained him. The shot would have meant his certain death, for he never could have got away from that place without drawing attention to himself. That would not have made him pause; cheerfully would he have given up his own life to finish the Half Breed. But suppose Amy Benham was there, his own death would materially diminish her chance of escape. He

had to bide his time and hold his hand, but he had never attempted a harder thing.

He divined after a while that this was a small band of Oglalas. It had been Yellow Foot's band, but he had been slain back in the cañon, and the Half Breed had fallen heir to the leadership of it. The other Indians, most Cheyennes, were on the march elsewhere under Roman Nose. This band was practically detailed to remain in the vicinity and observe the troopers for a day or two, apparently, and then follow after the main body. The soldiers had evidently sustained a severe check.

The sight of his arch enemy made him more certain than ever that Amy Benham must be in one of the tepees. It was very late in the afternoon now; the day was almost done and evening was approaching. The cattleman was tired, cramped in his narrow quarters, worn out by his long vigil, and he prayed that night might speedily come to help him make his attempt. Meanwhile he did not take his eyes off the village, and the Half Breed, especially. He observed him go in and out one of the largest tepees several times and concluded that this was his own.

Sullivan had a good eye for topography. He marked the location of it well, and also the character of the surrounding country. It would be moonlight shortly after the sun set, which was bad for his plan, but he could not help that. The camp itself was shaded by a growth of pine trees. He saw where the herd of ponies was kept. He laid his plans with the keenest calculations he was capable of.

He had some food in the pocket of his hunting shirt, and the water in his canteen kept him from suffering severely from thirst. Nevertheless, he was very glad when the sun set at last after the long June day, and darkness filled the cañon. Its direction was such that the moonlight shone upon the farther side and the deep shadow about him made his position the more secure.

He arose to his feet as soon as it was safe to do so, and slipped off his own clothing. He even divested himself of his heavy boots and dragged on the moccasins of the Indian over his larger feet. He put on everything, war bonnet and all. His hair was black and his skin swarthy; although his hair was curly he hoped no one would observe that in the darkness or the moon-

light. His white arms would have betrayed him had he bared them in accordance with Indian custom, but he happened to have on a dark brown undershirt, and that he did not remove.

He waited until the camp went to sleep. It was perhaps half after nine or ten o'clock before he thought it safe to venture.

Sullivan was not what you would call a religious man, and perhaps if only his own life had been concerned he would not have thought of it, but he was going to make a desperate endeavor for her, and so before he stepped out of the cañon, he knelt down among the stones and put up a voiceless prayer that he might succeed.

He had two objects in view. One was to get the girl and the other was to kill the Half Breed. Skirting the wall of the cañon as long as he could, and keeping well within the shadow of the trees wherever they served, Sullivan at last gained the outskirts of the camp. Once a dog sprang at him out of the darkness, open-mouthed, but the man struck it such a sudden, terrific blow on the head before it had given tongue that it fell back senseless.

The tepee he had marked stood on rising ground about midway one flank of the camp. There happened to be no others between it and the trees.

The ranchman stopped by the side of it and knelt down. He put his ear against the skins of which it was composed and listened. He could hear deep breathing within. What it betokened he could not say. He drew his knife and cut a slit and peered within. The entrance flap in front of the other side happened to be thrown back. The night was warm and the entering air would be refreshing to the sleepers. The moonlight shot a beam into the darkness of the tent through the opening. By its faint refraction he could make out three figures therein. Two of them were sprawled out on the ground on one side; the third lay in a huddle on the other. All three seemed to be sound asleep.

"Was one of them she? If so, which? Which was the Half Breed? Who could be the other?"

He would have given a year of his life for more light. His was a frightful risk. Suppose he effected an entrance and woke the wrong

person! Suppose he made a mistake and injured her!

He found himself plunged into a cold sweat, which no fear for himself would ever have brought to the skin. He hesitated, by the side of the tepee, but realizing that his safety and probable success depended upon celerity, cautiously still, but swiftly, he made a long enough slip to admit him to creep through. Holding the knife in one hand and having swung his revolver belt forward so he could grasp it readily, his Winchester being swung across his back, he crept into the wigwam. So far having made no sound he had not disturbed the heavy sleep of the inmates.

Inside he could hear better and see better still. The pale moonlight outlined more clearly to his staring eyes the three figures. To the right lay two men, to the left a smaller figure, undoubtedly a woman's, covered by a blanket. He crept slowly toward this smaller figure, praying God that he might be right and that it might be she.

Whoever she was, she was lying on her right side with a light blanket drawn over her face.

The man, knife in hand, bent over the figure, silently listening to its regular, slow breathing. He must discover who she was. He must make certain.

There were but two ways. He could call her name softly, or else draw back the blanket and strive to recognize her in the darkness. Which should he try?

Thinking quickly, he decided upon both methods. Reaching his hand out he softly drew the blanket aside, at the same time saying in a whisper close to the woman's ear,—

"Amy!"

It was a woman. It was not she! He had just time to draw back, when the woman, rising on her elbow, saw his bulk in the moonlight and cried out. There was alarm in her voice. It awoke the two men in the tent to instant life. They had slept heavily enough, but they were as easily aroused. It seemed to Sullivan that they were on their feet at the first outcry.

Recognizing that he had failed to find the woman he loved, the ranchman had also sprung to his feet. He happened to stand full in the moonlight. The others stared at him a moment,

and then with the instinct of fight, closed in on him. One of them was evidently the Half Breed, for he called out an oath in English. Which one was he? Sullivan could not tell in the dim light and he had little time to ascertain. At any rate, the rancher struck the first man full and fair in the breast with his knife. Driven with terrific force, it sank to the hilt, and the unfortunate recipient of the blow was hurled to the ground stone dead. As the other man sprang at him out of the darkness, in default of another weapon—for the knife had been wrenched from his hand by the falling body—Sullivan clenched his fist and struck him a terrible blow on the side of the head. The second man also reeled and fell. The next instant the ranchman burst out of the tepee.

He knew his way perfectly. The moonlight now gave him sufficient illumination. He dashed through the camp at top speed.

But the struggle in the wigwam had been noticed. The man he had stabbed was dead; the man he had struck was senseless, but the woman was very much alive. She filled the whole camp with her outcries. Indians in a moment

were springing from every tepee. Sullivan caromed away from one of them. Another made a snatch at him and tore off his headdress. Glad to be freed from the encumbrance he sped on. Some one seeing a fugitive rushing past his tepee, fired a random shot at him. Instantly the whole camp was in a terrific uproar. Shots were fired in the darkness, all the dogs in the camp ran wildly about barking.

The confusion helped him. By this time he had reached the outskirts. To catch a pony was not difficult. Selecting the biggest one he found, he threw himself astride of it, turned and dashed across the stream, and headed for the uplands.

He had made a brave attempt and had failed. Nor was he to get off scot free, for he could see in the moonlight that there was mounting in hot haste behind him and that a score of Indians were preparing to hunt him down. If he had had a decent horse he would have laughed their endeavors to scorn, but he soon found that fortune had not been kind to him in that particular, and that the pony he bestrode was in no way up to his weight.

Well, the poor bronco would have to go on until he dropped, and when he did, Sullivan would fight until he, too, dropped. They should never get him alive and they should be made to pay dearly for catching him at all.

What difference did it make, anyway, since Amy Benham was lost to him. The woman in the tepee had not been she. Where in God's world was she? What in God's name had happened to her?

With this thought burning in his brains he raced up the hills, seeking safety in the uplands.

CHAPTER XVI

IN THE "HOLE-IN-THE-WALL"

"HOW many days have we been here?" asked the white woman.

For answer, the silent Mah-wissa held up her hand, the thumb bent inward.

Amy Benham nodded.

"Four," she said, mournfully, "and in all that time we have not seen or heard a human being."

She stared in desperation over the bare rocks and down the sparsely wooded valley as she spoke. The solitude was unbroken. There was no large game in the valley and even few bird calls disturbed the primeval silence.

"I wonder if they will ever find us?" she asked.

Mah-wissa nodded.

"By an' by. Sojer come. Cowboy come."

"I wish they might come soon, then," returned the girl, "for if they don't they won't find

us alive. I'm so hungry, and we divided the last piece of meat in your pouch last night."

"No," said Mah-wissa. She reached back into a crevice of the rock and drew forth several pieces of jerked-beef and one small section of hard bread. "I got some."

She held it out toward the white woman.

"Mah-wissa!" exclaimed Amy sternly, "where did you get it?"

Duplicity was useless. The source was too patent. She had secreted her own daily portion.

"I no hungry. Sioux no eat like white woman," she nodded gravely, again proffering the scanty, wretched remains of food. "This for you."

"I will not take it," protested the girl passionately. "You have deprived yourself of your share for my sake! I will not eat it!"

"Yes," said the squaw, pressing it upon her.

"No, I tell you, I cannot. It would choke me!"

"If no take, I throw 'way," answered Mah-wissa, resolutely, rising to her feet and stepping

toward the mouth of the cave, limping badly as she did so.

"Will you eat half of it then?" pleaded the girl, clutching her arm.

"I no hungry," repeated the brave squaw again.

"You are. You must eat," said the white woman, equally bravely.

"No, no!"

"Some of it anyway, half of it!" pleaded the girl.

But Mah-wissa made no motion to take any.

"If you don't," Amy ran on, as Mah-wissa looked at her stubbornly, " I won't take any myself."

Will matched will and resolution looked at resolution. The Indian at last nodded. She apportioned the scraps fairly enough and the two women fell upon them frantically.

All the food that Mah-wissa had brought with her was thereby exhausted. They had no weapons, no means of killing any game even if they chanced upon it. They had tried making a fish hook out of a hair pin, but without success; at least, they had not caught any

fish. There was plenty of water, fortunately, and save for a ravenous hunger they had passed through the adventure well enough. Their clothes were torn and ragged; their hands and feet sore and not yet healed, but these were small matters. They were facing a graver problem.

Again and again had the Indian woman urged the white woman to leave her and each time had Amy Benham refused. She had nursed the squaw's ankle and cared for it as tenderly as she had nursed the squaw's pappoose the year before. Thanks to her skillful care, the sprain was much better. Mah-wissa could walk again, but as yet, no great distance. She could scarcely have attempted to cross the mountains or to go out of the valley. Nor could Amy Benham have reached home alone for that matter, although that had not occurred to her or to her humble companion, with whom she resolutely elected to stay.

They had found a sort of cave in the cliffs. Bowlders had fallen, split from the precipitous wall until the recess was almost completely hidden. There was a long, narrow, winding en-

trance to it, like a miniature pass in the mountains. It was dry within, save where in one corner a little spring bubbled out of the rock. There Amy had brought quantities of pine boughs, which, when covered with Mah-wissa's tattered blanket, had made them at least a better bed than the hard rocks. It grew quite cold at night, but they lay close together and did the best they could. They had husbanded their poor amount of food carefully but now it was all gone.

They were not at all sure where they were. The general direction, points of the compass, that is, they got from the north star at night and the sun in the daytime, but just how far away the ranch lay, or how they could get to it was a problem. The rain that had commenced to fall the morning of their arrival had been torrential in its character. They imagined how it might have filled the cañon, and Mah-wissa thought that probably the wild spread of the vast volume of water, whose only outlet would be the river over which they had crossed, had probably made the return trail in that direction impracticable.

The valley they were in was curious enough. Hunters and prospectors called such places "Holes," or sometimes, from their narrow slit-like entrances, "Holes-in-the-Wall." The valley was a long amphitheater surrounded completely by precipitous mountains. A river fell over the cliffs to the northward, some ten miles away, and flowed gently across the level bottom, its current dividing wherever it met with an obstacle, forming many islands, until it reached a deep rift in the encircling cliffs, through which it plunged noisily, and then rapidly rushed its way down the mountain, probably joining the stream they had crossed in the cañon whence they had come. They had camped somewhere near its mouth.

There were many such "Holes" in the mountains, some of them quite famous. Access to or egress from most of them was over one narrow trail, easily defended and blockaded. That being held, the valley was as safe as a fortress. Consequently, they were much resorted to by outlaws and masterless men, and the frontier lore is filled with tales of such devils' strongholds.

In this case, however, the two women oc-

cupied the thirty or forty square miles enclosed apparently alone. The mountains had never yet been fully explored. Perhaps this hiding place had never been discovered. It may have been thought unavailable had any one visited it, because it was not so completely enclosed as to enable possible inhabitants to hold it easily. At any rate, save for them, it was now empty.

Amy had been confident when they first stopped there that in a day or two they would be found and taken back in safety. She reasoned that both Sullivan and Kennard would be after her. Her chief anxiety had been lest they should first be discovered by some wandering Indian war party. She had learned from Mah-wissa that the whole Sioux Nation and the allied Cheyennes were on the warpath, but she knew the soldiers would be ordered out immediately, and she supposed they would sweep the Indians before them. It never occurred to her that perhaps the troops would sustain a check and the Indians would be left in control of the region.

The two women had passed the time drearily enough. Mah-wissa's vocabulary was limited,

and although Amy strove earnestly to improve her English, to impart to her ideas foreign to the native of the land and to give her some conception of religion, she could not do that all the time, and there were periods when the two women sat side by side in the mouth of their cave, forlornly staring out at the quiet, utterly desolate landscape before them.

They had been glad of the rest the first day after the awful hardship and labor of their escape, but thereafter the white woman's spirit, unaccustomed to inaction, chafed and fretted with growing resentment at each succeeding period of enforced quiet. She had that Anglo-Saxon temper which would fain face death, if it must be faced, on the feet and in action. To sit quietly down waiting to be stricken further down was intolerable.

They had had abundant opportunity for self-communion, for Mah-wissa was taciturn as most Indians, and spoke not at all until she was addressed. The girl had time, therefore, to go over all the terrible happenings of the last few days. For the first time since his death, she could grieve unrestrainedly for her father.

Her mourning was deep and sincere and would be abiding. Yet her own concerns and the probabilities and the possibilities of her own future weighed so heavily on her that they served somewhat to mitigate and assuage her grief.

She divided her reflections between the past and the future, the future naturally encroaching more and more upon the past; and to Captain Kennard she devoted most of her thoughts —to him and to Sullivan. She wished ardently for them both. She would have been rejoiced beyond measure to see either, but he whom her soul craved was the soldier.

She sought to recall every moment of their two years of pleasant and intimate relationship together. Every look that Kennard had given her, every word that he had said to her, every action they had shared, every indication by which she had noted that he loved her, she dwelt upon lovingly. Why did he not come? Surely, if she had been in his place, she would have found her way to him over mountains twice as high, and through valleys twice as long. Had she been the soldier and he the woman, nothing would have kept them apart so long.

And Sullivan and the men of the ranch! She asked resentfully and unsatisfiedly where were they?

In general, however, she did not rebel. Following the common lot of women, she prayed and waited. Waited with a growing faintness of heart and an increasing despair of soul as each day brought nothing.

That morning, save for Mah-wissa's forethought and self-denial, they had been face to face with absolute starvation. In their weakened and wretched condition they might linger two or three days before they died. If help did not come within that time it would be too late. Well, there were worse deaths than that which confronted her, and she was glad that she had escaped them — at least she would die free.

It was yet early in the morning when they divided the last morsel of food. As they were expecting nothing, they were greatly surprised and aroused into a state of sickening expectation by hearing rifle shots above their heads and off to the northeast. Their first instinct was to withdraw further into the burrow they had found, but second thoughts told them that

they should, if possible, learn what was going on seemingly so near.

Mah-wissa seized a stout stick Amy had found for her under the trees and the two women stepped to the mouth of the cave and started to the northward and upward. The cliffs overhung the place where they stood. They could see nothing. As they listened they heard more rifle shots, and this time apparently nearer.

"We must see what it is," said Amy.

The Indian nodded. Supporting her, the white woman led the way to a portion of the wall which jutted out into the valley. Cautiously peering around this, they stared upward again. As they did so, they heard another series of rapid discharges, and the next moment a figure on horseback appeared on the edge of the cliff, a man in full Indian dress, wearing a war shirt but no bonnet. In his hands he clasped a Winchester, which he had apparently just discharged. He had halted his exhausted pony on the very brink of the precipice. He could go no farther.

Listening and looking, the two women heard wild calls faintly, and more shots. These de-

cided the solitary horseman upon action. The cliff bent away in a great half circle from the point at which the women stood so that they could see what he was doing. He got off his horse quickly and stepped to the very edge of the sheer descent. He looked down a moment. Evidently he intended to make an effort to escape that way. To the watching women it seemed utterly beyond human possibility that he could do it. Speculations as to who he was, and why he was so desperately anxious to escape were lost for the moment in the frightful possibilities of his endeavor.

Sheltering himself behind the body of the horse, which evidently was so utterly exhausted as scarcely to be able to move, the man loaded his rifle, brought it to his shoulder and pumped a half dozen shots in quick succession out of it. His discharge was answered by a return volley and by a wild outbreak of demoniac yells. He did not wait any longer. He turned and let himself down over the cliff, facing inward. He hung at full length for a second and then let go. The women held their breath as they watched him fall.

"Great Heavens!" exclaimed Amy, "he will be dashed to pieces."

But they were unable to see certain inequalities in the surface which looked so sheer, for sliding down the face of the cliff which here sloped inward a little as it fell away, the fugitive brought up against a narrow ledge which had been his goal when he let go. He struck the ledge with shocking force, the distance was so great. For a moment his body bent and swayed, and the watchers thought he would pitch over, but his hands, which had been clutching the rock, caught in some crevice. Evidently he had saved himself. He shook and trembled but steadied himself and finally stood secure. He did not dare to pause for rest, it seemed, for he took a few careful yet rapid steps, creeping sidewise, until he found another ledge to which he dropped again.

Again and again he repeated the process. He seemed to bear a charmed life. That the descent could be made by human being without a dozen falls, if one body could stand so many, was well nigh unthinkable.

Finally he reached the last ledge—a broader

streak of rock than the others. There was nothing below him but a sheer drop of perhaps fifteen or twenty feet, and broken rock at the base of the cliff to receive his fall. He had lost his rifle in the descent, having been compelled to use both of his hands to save his life, and it had clattered to the rocks beneath after the first slide down the cliff.

Moved by some impulse, Amy Benham, regardless of consequences, in spite of the fact that the rocks cut through the ragged remains of her moccasins and the tattered bandages made from the blanket, stepped swiftly out into the open and secured the rifle just as the man got cautiously down to his knees on the last ledge, and then with one desperate resolution, thrust himself backward and fell.

Before he struck the ground, the white woman, who had regained her place of watchfulness, had covered him. The shot would be an easy one; if he proved an enemy his life would be forfeit. The man, however, lay where he had fallen. The huge bulk of his body was between the girl's and his face, which pointed to the northward. He had been

stunned or perhaps killed by the last downward plunge.

"Me go," whispered Mah-wissa, lifting the knife she still carried.

Her meaning was obvious. She would kill him as she had killed the Indian in the pass and with as little compunction of conscience.

"Wait!" said the wiser white woman. "We don't know who is the man or why he is here. Perhaps he is a soldier."

"Look!" interposed the Indian woman, touching her elbow.

Following Mah-wissa's upturned glance, Amy Benham stared at the top of the cliff, whose edge was now peopled with figures. There could be no possible mistake as to their character. They were Indians! The foremost among them was a man whom the white woman would have recognized anywhere, almost at any distance, the Half Breed. Her blood ran cold at the sight of him. She shrank back behind the point, dragging Mah-wissa with her in her intensity of fear.

The Indians dropped from their ponies and peered over the cliff. They could see lying on

the broken rock beneath them the prostrate figure of him they had been pursuing. The fugitive did not stir. He lay as one dead. Perhaps he was dead. There was an animated discussion at the top of the cliff, and suddenly some of the Indians raised their guns.

"They are going to shoot him," whispered Amy to Mah-wissa, both peering cautiously from their place of concealment. "Who can he be?"

There was something familiar about the huge bulk of the man. She had not seen his face clearly; the light had been behind him, but—

Her speculations were shattered by a crashing volley. They could see the rocks break and splinter all about the body of the fugitive. He must have been struck, for he rose unsteadily to his feet, fumbling for his revolver, drew it, but before he could press the trigger, a bullet struck it and threw it far from his hand. Blood was streaming from his face. He was a terrible looking figure, but he had evidently recovered his faculties, for as the smoke blew away and he saw the Indians aiming at him again, he plunged forward on his knees and crawled

against the face of the rock, where he was completely sheltered from above. As he did so he faced the spot where the two women were hiding.

CHAPTER XVII

DROPPED FROM THE SKY

"MERCIFUL God!" whispered Amy to the Indian woman, "it's Sullivan."

She lifted the rifle as if about to step forward and fire at the Indians in his defense.

"No," said the squaw earnestly, dragging her back, "they go. We get him by and by. Me look."

She got down on her knees and peered northward. A thin crevice in the rock gave her sight and yet hid her face as she stared and stared, the white girl meanwhile standing back of her, well out of view, desperately clutching the rifle.

How did Sullivan come there and in that guise? What had happened? She had prayed for his coming, or for Kennard's, as for a preserver, and lo! he appeared before her like a hare that is hunted. And the Half Breed was triumphantly leading the party that hounded him on.

"They gone," whispered Mah-wissa at last.

"Let us go and get him then," answered Amy.

"Wait. Maybe come back," objected the squaw with all the caution of her race.

Indeed it was only by the exercise of her greater strength that the Indian woman kept the white woman where she was until she thought it safe. Presently, however, she released her and Amy instantly darted out into the open and around to the side of the prostrate man. More slowly Mah-wissa followed her.

He was lying with his eyes closed. Over his face spread a death-like pallor. The fingers of his left hand were torn and bruised and one on his right hand had been crushed by the bullet that had torn his revolver from his grasp. His clothing was torn to pieces by his slide down the cliff. His broad chest was cut, torn and bleeding. A bullet had apparently gone through his shoulder, for his left arm was soaked with blood. He was in a desperate condition. So noiseless had been the girl's swift approach that he was not aware of it until she spoke his name.

"Sullivan!" she cried.

"Amy!" gasped out the man, opening his eyes in astonishment, "you are here and safe?"

She nodded.

"Thank God!"

"But you?" asked the girl, "what has happened to you?"

"I thought I was done for," he replied thickly, "but you give me new lease of life. I am worth a thousand dead men now. Is there water?"

By this time Mah-wissa had joined them.

"Who is this?" exclaimed the ranchman suspiciously.

But Mah-wissa gave no time to answer. She pointed upward.

"Look!" she cried in an alarmed voice.

Amy Benham glanced upward. Peering over the brink a short distance away was the feathered head of an Indian. He stared down at the two women. His rifle was in his hand but he made no effort to use it. The Half Breed had indeed retired but he had left a watcher to make sure that the man was dead, or to get him in case he came from the shelter of

the rock. The squaw realized at once what a misfortune this discovery was.

"What is it?" asked Sullivan, who could see nothing.

"There is an Indian up there," answered the girl.

"My God!" groaned the poor man, "have I brought them all down upon you?"

He also knew exactly what discovery by the Half Breed's party would mean to the poor girl, so far having escaped him.

"We can't think of that now," said Amy, with a certain amount of indifference. "They may be there. They are not here. There are not many men on this earth who could get down that cliff as you did!"

"Did you see?"

"We watched you. We saw it all. It was magnificent. We didn't know who it was until you—"

"What do now?" interposed the more practical minded squaw at this juncture.

"We must get away from here," said Sullivan; "if we only had a pony."

"We have found a sort of cave beyond the point yonder. We will take you there."

"You will have to help me," was the reply. "I am terribly bruised and cut, and one of those fiend's bullets has gone through my shoulder. If I only had some water."

"You watch by him, Mah-wissa," said Amy.

She stepped out into the open, reckless of a possible shot from the Indian still watching them curiously and eagerly, ran around the promontory and back to the cave. Mah-wissa's canteen full of water lay on a rock shelf; she seized it, ran back quickly and put it to the ranchman's lips. Sullivan almost drained it.

"That puts new life into me," he said with a stronger voice. "This is the first drop of water I have had since ten o'clock last night. God! it was a fearful race. Now help me up."

In spite of the fact that he was weak, that his right hand was bleeding, that he had a bullet through his shoulder, that two of his ribs were broken, and that his chest was half flayed, the man by a magnificent exercise of nerve and courage, lifted himself to his knees, and with

the woman he loved supporting him, he finally arose to his feet. He swayed heavily for the moment, and would have fallen but for her.

"He shoot now," cried Mah-wissa warningly.

She had observed the Indian above raising his rifle.

"We 'll have to chance it," said Sullivan thickly. "You go in front of me, Miss Amy."

"No," was the reply, "side by side. You first, Mah-wissa."

And so the three—a brave little Indian squaw, a ragged, tattered, worn-out but indomitable American girl, and the big rancher, shot, cut and torn to pieces—started out into the open.

Sure enough, the Indian fired, not once but twice before they could turn the promontory. His bullets fortunately missed. One of them plowed through the tattered sleeve of the white woman's waist. The other was flattened harmlessly against a rock behind them.

"It is a good thing for us that they are always such poor shots," said the cattleman gratefully.

The next moment they rounded the promontory and were out of sight of the watcher. A few painful steps brought them to

the mouth of the cave. Guided and supported by Amy Benham, the cattleman followed Mah-wissa into the recess.

When the Indian at last reached the promontory—he had a wide spread of country to traverse owing to the configuration of the valley wall—they were nowhere to be seen. He searched the place with his glances and then suddenly withdrew.

"A fine place for defense," said the cattleman, alert to the probable requirements of the situation. "What food have you?"

"None!"

"There is a piece of jerked-beef in my pouch," he said, "or there was when I put it on. It should be hanging at my belt."

"It is not there," said Amy after a brief inspection.

"It must have been torn off when I fell down the cliff."

"Me get," said Mah-wissa, slipping out through the entrance.

"Have you any water?"

"Plenty," was the answer. "There is a spring on the other side."

"Help me over to it then, and I will try and get myself in shape."

"No," said the girl, "I am going to do that."

"You 've got nothing for bandages."

"Yes," was the answer.

She turned away for a little space and came back with several long strips of soiled white fabric.

"The remainder of my skirt," she said, smiling faintly.

She had filled the canteen also. She knelt down beside him and washed the poor shattered fingers as well as she could and bound them up tenderly.

"Now the shoulder," she said, when she had finished the first task.

Fortunately the wound was not a serious one. The bullet had gone clear through the fleshy part of the shoulder, which had probably saved his life, for he had been in a dead faint and the pain of the wound had recalled him to consciousness in time for him to crawl under the overhang where he was protected from their dropping shots. As luck would have it, the wound was also a clean one and there was little

to be done but wash it and then make such bandages for it as she could. Then, with the last remaining piece of the skirt she washed his face free from blood that had matted upon it, and tied up his hand. She even washed the blood and dirt from his mighty chest. There was nothing she could do for his broken ribs, of course.

He bore the pain of her manipulations without a murmur and with the stoic resolution of an Indian himself. His courage even evoked a grunt of approval from the squaw, who had come back unharmed with the precious pouch in her hand and who lent such assistance as she could.

When it was all over, and Amy had done what she could for him, she sank down on the rocky bottom of the recess by his side and fought desperately against an overwhelming inclination to faint away.

"When have you had anything to eat?" asked Sullivan, assuming, as by right, command of the situation as soon as everything had been done for him.

"This morning."

"Well," he felt in the pouch with his left hand, "the piece of jerked-beef is there all right. We 'd better keep it until tomorrow if you can stand it that long."

"I can stand anything now that you are here," said Amy bravely. "I feel so much more confident since —"

Sullivan raised his hand.

"I 'm afraid that I have only brought them down upon you. There must be some way into this valley. You got into it. They must know how to get here. I killed one man in the Half Breed's wigwam, hunting for you, and he will never leave my trail until he gets me or I get him. They will be here before the day is out. What weapons have you?"

"Nothing."

"Me got knife," said Mah-wissa, showing her formidable weapon.

"What else?"

"I forgot your Winchester," responded Amy, handing the gun to him. "When I saw you slip down the cliff I thought you might be an Indian fleeing from the soldiers, and as it fell near us, I ran out and seized it."

"Let me have it."

Sullivan took, examined it carefully, and laid it aside.

"The ejector is broken," he said bitterly. "It 's useless. The lock is smashed. It can't be fired again."

"And your revolver?"

"Smashed, too, when these fingers got it," was the reply.

"We are indeed helpless, then," said the girl, despondently.

"Not so long as I can stand in that narrow way," answered Sullivan, grimly.

"But you have no firearms!"

"I can use the gun as a club."

"But you can't beat them off forever with that."

"No," said the man. "I can't, but I can give you time enough to die, if the worst comes to the worst."

"Yes," said the girl, looking him bravely in the face.

"And with Mah-wissa's knife," continued the cattleman.

"I understand."

"I don't know how you escaped," Sullivan ran on, "but you are—unharmed?"

There was a fiercely anxious note of apprehension in the question.

"Entirely."

"Thank God!" was the fervent reply.

"It is all due to Him and to my good Mahwissa," said the girl, gratefully.

"Well, you can't tempt Providence again," the rancher continued, his great relief plainly apparent. "You must never give them another chance. I will fight for you until—I am down and out—and then you must do the rest."

"Trust me," said the girl.

"You understand what I mean?" he asked anxiously.

"I understand," she answered softly, yet with eyes shining with resolution.

"Good!" exclaimed Sullivan in deep satisfaction.

The girl smiled at him and laid her cool hand upon his fevered head.

"Do try and get some rest," she urged.

"It is a strange meeting," said the cattleman, who would evidently much rather talk to her,

"and this is a strange time to tell you, but ever since I knew you I have loved you! It was you who kept me on the ranch. It was the thought of seeing you in the summer time when you came back, that made me stay there in the long winter and wait. For you I gave up my roving life and spendthrift ways and began to save money. I was planning to tell you that I loved you, and to ask you—to give you a chance of saying that you could not be my wife."

The girl's eyes were full of tears.

"My dear friend for whom I care so much," she said tenderly, "don't ask me that!"

"I am not asking you," was the answer. "I 'm just telling you. We are never going to get out of this alive, and there is no need of your making any reply. The soldier man—he loves you, too," he added, with great-hearted magnanimity.

"Does he?" choked the girl through her tears, and yet glad at heart for the assurance.

"Yes," said the cattleman; "he told me in the cañon yonder. We were both on your trail. We found your slippers."

The woman nodded.

"He gave me one and kept one himself. Mine's gone. I must have lost mine coming down the wall. I kept it in the pocket of my hunting shirt, over my heart. He loves you, too. I called him a coward but he is a good and a brave man."

"Yes," said the girl, "and you are a brave man, too."

"You could n't have loved both of us if you had got away," continued the cattleman gravely. "Tell me, honestly, is he the one you would give yourself to if we both asked you?"

"Sullivan," she said faintly, hard put to it by his searching questions but determining to be true, "I cannot lie to you in the presence of death. Love is a strange thing. I have known you for many years. You have been so good to me and I do love you, but not that way. He—"

"Never mind," interposed Sullivan, gently, as the woman buried her face in her hands and burst into a fit of passionate weeping. He patted her softly on her bowed head with his left hand, although it gave him pain to raise his arm. "Never mind," he murmured, "I make no doubt he is the better man."

"It is not that," said the girl; "I cannot help it."

"No more you can't, Miss Amy. We can't any of us help it," he assented.

"And I 'd rather die than hurt your feelings now," said the girl, looking at him.

"It 's all right," he said firmly. "I am here to help you as much as I can; to give my last breath for you; to die for you; to give you a chance to die yourself, if need be. And this makes it easier, too. I heard a preacher say once that people like you ought to live and die —unspotted from the world. Those were his words, I think."

Amy Benham crept near to the big man, who was sitting up, leaning against the rocky wall of the cave. She reached over and took his poor wounded hand gently in her own, bent down and pressed a kiss upon it.

"Well," said Sullivan, staring straight ahead of him down the narrow way to the cave, "they 'll have a hard battle with me before they get to where you are, Miss Amy."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE ROUGH RIDERS OF THE WEST

THE night of the drawn battle between the soldiers of Wainwright's command and Roman Nose's detachment of Indians, the expected company of civilian scouts reported at camp. There were some twenty cowboys from the Benham ranch, led by old Johnson, and thirty other good men, gathered from the nearest of the frontier settlements. Every man brought his own horse and arms. They were splendidly mounted for they had the pick of the horses of the country to choose from. Each man carried a Winchester and a Colt's .45. A blanket and a pair of saddlebags for provisions and a cartridge belt jammed full of ammunition completed their equipment. They rode light, had no other baggage and carried no tents. They were hardy men, accustomed to the frontier, chosen for their ability to ride hard, shoot

straight, to fight anything, to disdain any odds, and to endure to the end.

Among them were some men of prominence who had agreed to serve for the fun of the thing. A few were college men. Some were old soldiers, but the main body was made up of experienced frontiersmen. Such a body of rough riders had probably never before assembled. Rightly led and judiciously handled, there was no end to what they could do. Sullivan would have made an ideal commander for them, but he was still absent and unaccounted for. Through Johnson as spokesman, their demand of the Colonel had been for him. Their disappointment that he was not with the command was unmistakable.

"Gentlemen," said the Colonel, fully sympathizing but rejoicing at the chance he had at getting them under a regular soldier like Kennard, "I regret it as much as you. He left Captain Kennard's troop in a cañon yonder, determined to try single-handed to effect the rescue of Miss Benham, whom he believed to be in a village which he had discovered."

"Was he left behind by the soldiers, deserted?" asked one of the men, threatening.

"By no means. He stayed voluntarily after I had ordered the troop to return because I was convinced of what afterwards developed, that an ambuscade had been laid for them. Indeed, had they gone farther they would have gone to their utter extermination."

"Who commanded the troops?"

"I did," said Kennard, stepping into the firelight, "and it is just as Colonel Wainwright says. I would have gone on gladly and risked my life to rescue Miss Benham, although we had no certain knowledge that she was in the village, only a probability, or perhaps better only a possibility, but my orders were imperative. I had no option. And as the Colonel has said, we had scarcely begun to retrace our steps before the danger he feared developed. If he had not brought the rest of the regiment to our rescue, neither I nor any man in that cañon would ever have got out of it to tell the tale."

"And what became of Big Sullivan?"

"I do not know. He is a brave man and a skillful one. And the Indians were busy with

us. They probably did not observe him. I have an idea that he lay hidden in the cañon until nightfall and then did what he could. What that might be, or where he is, or what he is doing, I cannot tell."

"Could we ride after him?"

"Not if you entered the service of the United States. And in any case it would be of no use. You would ride to certain death and effect nothing," said Colonel Wainwright firmly. "Gentlemen, I shall not disguise from you," he went on with growing emphasis, "that so soon as you are regularly enlisted as civilian scouts in the Government service, you will have to obey orders explicitly. I do not expect from you the drilling and the maneuvering of regularly trained soldiers, but it will be impossible for you to cooperate with us except on the ground of instant and unquestioned obedience to every command that may be given you by proper authority."

"Under whose command do you propose to place us?" asked one of the old soldiers who fortunately leavened the band.

"I wish to consult you about that, of course. But if I am allowed to decide that question, I

shall put you under Captain Kennard here. He is one of the most experienced Indian fighters in my regiment. He was wounded in the Big Horn Mountains several years ago and got a medal of honor for his daring and courage. His own troop has been badly cut up and—"

"I should be glad," deftly interposed Kennard, as the Colonel paused, unwilling to dilate upon the mutinous spirit which had disgusted Kennard with his men, "I should be honored to have the command of such a body of men as you are. The Colonel has promised, in case you accept me, that we shall be detached from the regiment which is to remain here until heavily reinforced and that we shall have a roving commission, first starting to the westward across the range, where we think Roman Nose has led his men to join Crazy Horse to pile up on General Crook. We are to observe them, cut off the detached parties if we can, and cover the settlements to the southward. I promise you hard riding and plenty of fighting in the end."

"I see," said a new and youthful speaker from among the men; "we are to be free lances as it were."

"Exactly, but not too free, be it understood. You heard," Kennard continued, resolved to be absolutely frank, "what the Colonel said about obedience to orders. We shall be, if I am honored by your choice, a body of friends, I am sure, but the directing must be mine. Absolutely. Now, then, gentlemen, what do you say?"

"I 'm for Captain Kennard," said old Johnson instantly; "I know him."

"I 'm agreeable," broke from one of the other men.

"Wait!" said Captain Kennard, again interposing and determined to play fair. "Some of you come from Colonel Benham's ranch. You know that Sullivan and I are both in love with Miss Benham, and both would have sought to marry her. It is rather unusual to say such things to a body of men, but I am determined to be entirely open with you. Sullivan and I had words this morning because I insisted upon obeying orders, and it ended by his stigmatizing me and my command, when we turned back from the village, as cowards!"

"And did you take that?" asked a frontiersman curiously.

"I did," returned the other, although what it cost him to make the admission could scarcely be realized. "I was under orders. I could not engage in private quarrels then. I had to obey. I will settle with Sullivan later on, although I will admit that looking at things from his point of view there was some reason for his bitterness; but you understand now what obedience means to me, and what it will have to mean to you."

"I know Joe Kennard," burst out Chambers, a young frontier attorney from the county seat who had joined the scouts for the fun of it, as he phrased it. "I 've known him for years. There is n't a drop of coward's blood in his veins. I am glad to go with a man who knows his duty and will sacrifice his reputation even to it."

"Thank you, Chambers," said Kennard. "Meanwhile, what do the rest of these gentlemen say?"

"I 'm a friend of Sullivan's," spoke out old Johnson; "I know how hot-blooded he is, an' how he feels about Miss Benham, which I hopes he wins her instead of you, Cap'n, but the field is open, an' the best man 'll git her, fair an' square, I 'm certain. I 'm in hopes if we do come up

with the Boss, gents all, I can make it all right twixt him an' the Cap'n, an' as far as I 'm concerned, I 'm willing to serve under him. What do you say, boys?"

He listened a moment to the various words of approval and then suddenly called out,

"All those in favor, say aye!"

A roar of affirmation broke on the night air.

"Thank you, men," said the Colonel, now entering the conversation again. "That is hardly enough, however. There may be some man who has not answered. All those willing to accept Captain Kennard for their commander, and enter the service of the United States for this campaign, or until discharged by proper authority, will pass around to the right."

There was a tumultuous crowding of horses, and in a short time the whole body of men had arranged itself in some sort of order to the right of the Colonel.

"I am glad to see such unanimity," said old Wainwright, visibly pleased. "Chaplain," he called, and as the old army chaplain came forward; "will you let me have your Bible, please?"

The clergyman handed to the Colonel the small Bible which he took from the pocket of his jacket.

"Gentlemen," said the Colonel, "I have here a Bible on which I will swear you into the service of the United States. Raise your right hands."

Instantly every hand was raised and the deep voices of the men signified assent to the solemn oath of allegiance and service, which the Colonel gravely administered.

"Captain Kennard," he said, as he handed the Bible back to the Chaplain, "here is your troop. Muster it. See that the men are regularly put on a company roll. Take full charge and appoint your officers immediately. You will move at four o'clock in the morning. I can furnish you with four pack mules, a supply of ammunition, a medicine chest, and such rations as the men can carry on their persons."

"Very good, sir," said Kennard. "Gentlemen," he turned and faced the troop, "you have honored me, indeed, in giving me the command. Let us hope that the blessing of God will enable us to do good work for our country and the helpless settlements below us."

"An' let 's hope we git Benham's gal," cried one of the cow-punchers.

"Amen to that!" returned Kennard. "The regimental quartermaster will see to the making of the proper papers. I shall appoint Colonel Morris," he pointed to an old ex-Confederate soldier, "as second in command. Johnson, you will be next to him. Chambers, you next to Johnson. In case anything happens to me, the orders of these men in succession will be obeyed and respected accordingly. I will have you awakened at half after three. You can draw three days' rations, about all you can carry with your other stuff, from the Commissary at that time. At four o'clock, men, I mean to be on the way."

"You hain't forgot me, have you, Cap'n Kennard?" said a familiar voice out of the darkness.

"What, Meekins! No indeed," exclaimed the young Captain gladly. "Do you wish to be sworn in with the rest?"

"Not me," laughed the old trapper. "I gits there an' fights on my own hook, but if you want me to go 'long with you, why, I 'm willin'."

"I consider your presence worth that of any

dozen men, including myself, and meaning no discredit to the rest of the men," said Kennard warmly.

"I want to be in at the death," said the trapper grimly; "I got a hunch that we 're goin' to git the Half Breed, an' mebby find the gal."

"I hope so. I pray for another chance at him. But you had better unsaddle and picket your horses, gentlemen, and get what rest you can. Morris, will you and Johnson and Chambers attend to it. Now, good-night."

"Three cheers for Joe Kennard," cried old Johnson, waving his hat in the air.

CHAPTER XIX

SHOTS IN THE HILLS

THE dawn was just graying in the east when the rough riders filed out of the camp and trotted gently around the shoulder of the range, seeking a practicable pass to the westward. As usual, Kennard and Meekins rode at the head. The old frontiersman was talkative, as was his wont. He was silent enough when going into action, but he indulged his tongue freely on other occasions.

"You know," he said, "I can't help figgerin' that somehow the gal escaped down the trail. No, I did n't see no place where she could have descended to the cañon. The heavy rain which poured down all day had washed away any sign an' swept the slope bare 's the palm o' your hand. I never seed no such rain afore. There might have been ways to git down that mountain side, an' I sort o' remembers a place where it might have been possible for a desprit woman, espe-

cially afore the rain washed out any trees or rocks that might have made natural steps an' enabled her to git across the river, an' I got an idee that if we strikes acrost the range an' searches the valleys there, we might find her."

Kennard shook his head.

"She could never have escaped alone."

"Well, mebbe that 's so, too," returned the scout, "but who 's to say she was alone. There might have been some friendly Injin in that gang that stabbed the Injin in the pass. It don't look to me like Miss Benham would have killed him."

"You don't know what a woman can do when she is at bay," suggested Kennard.

"No, that 's true as Gospel," answered the frontiersman, "an' I 've seed 'em turned inter tigers by trouble an' danger. At any rate, there 's only two ways she could 'a gone, up the trail or down it. If she went up it, she 's either in that Injin village, or she ain't. If she went down it, she must 'a crossed the river somehow, somewhere. If she went up the trail an' is in the village, an' is still alive, Sullivan will git her, or git some word to her."

"He is a man in ten thousand," said the Captain; "even if he did put it into me, I can respect and admire him, just the same."

"He 'll be ready enough to take that back, Cap'n," said Meekins; "I knows him well."

"Well, I shall meet him half way," said Kennard.

Meekins looked at him inquiringly.

"With my hand outstretched the way he wants it," continued the Captain.

"An' how 's that?" asked the scout curiously.

"Empty or armed," the soldier answered quickly enough, but with his eyes sparkling.

"That 's the right spirit for a brave man. Meanwhile, I believe we 're goin' in the right direction to git the gal. I 've got a instinck that somethin 's goin' to happen afore this day 's over."

"What course do you think is the best for us to take?'

"Well, we can't git acrost the cañon nohow. We 'd best put to the south'ard until we come to the place where you divided the troop the other day, an' there we 'll strike acrost the range an' git into the uplands beyond. Then we 'll edge

away to the north'ard, doin' what we can to prospeck the country an' git in touch with the Injins in the way. Why, even if the gal was took to that camp, they 'll have undoubtedly broke up by this time and moved off the squaws and pappooses an' ponies an' plunder on the far side of their bucks—the war party, you know. You see that Roman Nose, who 's a mighty good soldier—his trick up the cañon showed that, when he nearly got your troop—will want to have his women well off to the north'ard where he can protect 'em. He 'll know that any pursuit has got to come from the south an' he 'll be lookin' out for us."

"I see."

"After their battle of yesterday," returned Meekins, "an' the fact that we 've retired from the field, they won't be apt to move till this mornin'. They 'll be dancin' an' jubilatin' around the camp fires an' they won't git much the start of us."

The reasoning of the old man was apparently accurate. His intuition was almost marvelous, thought Kennard, as he listened to this sagacious setting forth of the probabilities. The scout's

suggestions completely coincided with his own views and plans.

The going was good so long as they kept away from the broken country; the horses were fresh, the men were eager, so that by twelve o'clock, when they stopped for a brief respite, they had gone some forty miles. They had long since passed the mouth of the cañon and had crossed the river, which was there easily fordable, and had progressed some distance up the mountains. There was a practicable pass across the range before them, and this they were to essay after dinner.

"What lies beyond the pass?" asked Kennard of the scout, as he sat smoking with the men around the camp fire where bacon was broiling and coffee was cooking.

"Well, there 's three or four of them holes, you know, off to the north'ard, which I ain't never explored, an' then there 's a long stretch of gentle rollin' country, a kind o' high tableland. We can go for a hundred miles or so if we keep to the south'rd of the ranges that springs off to the west'ard. Them 'll be the mountains that 'll be coverin' Roman Nose's moves. I think our

best plan will be to cross the range to the north side arter a while."

"How 's the country there?"

"Rough. It 's most like the Bad Lands of the Dakotas."

"It will be no worse for us than for the Indians, however, and we will be nearer to them, with a better chance of observing them, and a better chance of striking them."

"Yep, that 's so."

"And then the mountains will always be on our left flank," put in old Colonel Morris, "affording us a place of retreat, if we should need it."

"There speaks the old soldier," said Kennard.

"Well," said Colonel Morris, "I didn't serve four years in the Confederate Cavalry for nothing. Why," he went on with the freedom of a veteran, "this takes me back to old times—"

"I hope, though," interposed Chambers, "there is n't going to be any retreating."

"That is as the Cap'n says," remarked Johnson philosophically, puffing at his pipe. "I begins to see that to make a success of a jaunt like

this we got to be under steady direction all the while, an' as for myself, an' the bunch I brung, we 're goin' to obey orders, every time."

"Thank you, Johnson," said Kennard, smiling slightly; "I see that you are a born soldier, if not an old one."

"I 'd be anything on earth," returned the cattleman, gravely, "if I could only git that gal back safe an' git my hands on that Half Breed, damn him!"

"Amen!" answered one of the Benham ranch crowd, to this singular prayer.

"Yep, that 's what we all say!" burst out one of the men from the group sitting near and listening intently to the conversation.

Kennard, touched on the raw, arose and walked away from the fire. He stood staring at the range, wondering what lay behind and whether it would be possible, in the Providence of God, that in that vast country he might find the woman he loved.

"He 's hard hit," said Chambers to the others.

"Aye," answered old Johnson, "an' from what I 've seen an' heerd, now that I recollects, I believe the gal 's in love with him, too. She

talked a heap about him last year when she come back from school on her vacation." He shook his head. "Poor Sullivan, I wonder where he is."

"He 's putting in good work for her somewhere, I 'll bet," said Colonel Morris, puffing away at his pipe. "And, if she is to be rescued single-handed, there is n't a man in Wyoming I had rather trust the job to than that big rancher."

"You are right," said Meekins, and the praise was the more magnanimous, since he himself might have fairly disputed with Sullivan, save in brute strength, availability for such tremendous services.

"It is hard on us all," remarked Chambers, "but it must be hardest for him," and he pointed back to Kennard, "and I for one am going to do everything in my power to second him."

"We 're all with you," cried one of the men from the group, amongst a chorus of warm approvals, which made Kennard at last turn around.

"Gentlemen," he said, "we have been here nearly an hour. In five minutes we must start."

The signal was welcomed with alacrity. The horses were saddled, and the men were soon on their way. For two hours they struggled upward through the pass. It was yet early in the afternoon when they at last crossed the backbone of the divide and descended to the other side. It was, as Meekins had predicted, a broad open, rolling country ahead and to the south of them. While to the north, the range shot a huge, high, towering spur abruptly far westward until it disappeared in the distance. Below, four or five miles away, swept a broad and shallow river, which seemed to issue from a rift in the precipitous wall of the mountain on the right of their advance.

The party drew rein on the summit of the pass to rest their horses, and gazed upon the enchanting picture. The old scout, however, had no especial eye for the beauty of the scene, and he instantly pointed out the river flowing from the cleft.

"That 'll be one of them holes I told you about. There, where the river flows out. You know Jackson's Hole, an' the other places them outlaws kept?"

"Yes," said Kennard.

"Well, that 'll be one just like it, I doubt not. She may be in a place like that."

"Would you advise that we cross the range then?"

"The sooner the better," answered Meekins.

"Do you know this country?"

"Not to any extent on yonder side of the Big Horn Range," answered Meekins.

"You think we could get across the range through one of these pockets or holes?"

"Hardly, but we 'll find some way, I am sure of it."

"Forward, gentlemen," said Kennard, starting down the slope.

The descent was easier than the ascent, and as the elevation of the western side of the mountains was higher, it was not so long. In half an hour they found themselves on the level upland. Increasing the pace to a trot, the little command moved rapidly forward.

It was now four o'clock in the afternoon when they splashed into the shallow river. They had edged toward the mountains and were but a few

rods from the narrow gate-like pass, whence it rushed torrentially, only to spread out in a shallow, gentle stream after its escape from the cliffs.

They stopped their horses in the river and let them drink of the cool, sweet water, and took occasion to bend down and fill their own canteens. Reluctant to draw them away from so pleasant a scene, the young Captain sat motionless, a little apart, looking at the men. They were a hard-bitten set, most of them, there was no doubt about that, but they looked capable and reckless to the last degree. He thought they would go on forever—and then some more, in the language of the frontier. He would have matched his own troop back in camp against any troop in the army before their mutinous conduct had shaken his confidence in them, but, saving the fact that these men had not been trained, and lacked the habit of subordination and long, hard drilling, which he had thought had welded his troop into a perfect machine, they were better men individually than the soldiers. They were a body of men he could lead anywhere, and do

anything with that human beings could be expected to do—and perhaps then some more again!

He turned at last from watching the laughing and chattering group, to stare hard at the mountain wall, and as he did so, he heard faintly through the opening made by the river, rifle shots!

Every man in the troop heard them at the same time. Every man straightened up on the instant, and listened in strained attention. Even the horses seemed to catch the infection of their riders' emotions, for they drew up their heads, and the place grew suddenly still except for the splashing of the water against the knees of the animals.

"Shots!" cried Meekins, "yonder in that hole! What can it be?"

"We are here to find out," said Kennard. "Come, gentlemen!"

He crossed the river to the firm bank and, followed by all, galloped headlong toward the narrow rift in the gigantic wall.

CHAPTER XX

THE CAVE-WOMAN

THERE had been occupation in plenty for the three castaways interred in that little cave during the long morning. Amy's escape and her doings since then had first of all to be told. Then, in turn the cattleman took up the history. He recounted all that had occurred since her father's death. He described the battle in the pass, the finding of her slippers. Alas! the one which Kennard had so generously given him had been torn from him as he slid down the cliffs. It was probably lying in some crevice of the rocks. He told her faithfully everything that had occurred, all that he had said and done, especially in that memorable scene in the pass where he had left the troops he had reviled. He neither accused nor excused himself nor any one. He just told the plain truth.

She listened with staring eyes and bated

breath, as he described the desperate hazard he had gone through in the wild search for the woman the Captain and he both loved.

She interrupted him infrequently until he came to the description of the episode in the box cañon where Kennard had refused to charge the village, and had chosen rather to obey orders, and where Sullivan had called him a coward.

The pallid countenance of the girl flushed deeply at this. Sullivan, who never took his eyes from her face, noticed the sudden glow in her cheeks.

"You don't like that," he said, with a curious sinking of the heart.

The girl shook her head. Her blue eyes flashed.

"You called the man I—" she checked herself in time. "You called him a coward and in the face of his troop. That was hard to bear," she went on. "What did he then?"

"He wanted to kill me," answered Sullivan simply. "Perhaps he would have killed me, or tried to, or I him, if he had n't been a soldier."

The suffering of the big ranchman was worse

than she knew. Her feelings were so patent and open, and although he had resigned himself to it—and indeed, whether she loved him or another, bade fair to be of little moment since life held practically no prospects for either of them —yet, he could scarcely bear it. It was like the turning of a knife in a raw and open wound just when it was sorest.

As for Amy Benham, she was a soldier's daughter, and had been brought up to a full realization of the duty of a soldier. His honor and allegiance and obligation were obvious to her from her father's old tales of ancient wars, in which he had borne a part. She comprehended the situation perfectly; and yet, she had not been a woman had she not felt a pang of fierce jealousy—that she had to give place even to the highest duty—which natural feeling Sullivan intensified by pointing out the facts of the case.

"You see, Miss Amy, he went back, but I came on."

It was boasting, of course, and not worthy of him, but the man was wrung with pain, physical and mental, and was so wildly jealous himself,

in spite of his brave attempt at philosophy, that he may be pardoned.

"He did his duty as a soldier."

"That 's what he said," returned Sullivan.

"And duty compelled him to return."

"Duty!" exclaimed the cattleman. "My whole duty was to find you, to rescue you, to save the girl I loved"—she here put out her hand, but he would not be checked—"from horrors worse than a thousand deaths, that involved tortures unthinkable. Do you imagine for a moment that I would let any duty interfere with that!"

"You are not a soldier," returned the girl, stoutly.

"I am your soldier," said Sullivan, equally resolute, "and if I had been the general in command I would have gone on just the same with an army—or alone—for you."

"And left your men to be massacred, for that would have happened had they followed you, would n't it?"

"I suppose so. Yes," was the reluctant admission. "Well, I would have left them just the same. What 's the world, or all the men in it, soldiers, or not, compared to you!"

It was rough wooing and powerful. Amy Benham would not have been human if she had not thrilled to it.

"I would have gone on," continued Sullivan, "though it had cost me my life and the lives of my men. I would let everything go to smash for you. Well, he went back!"

"What must it have cost him," said the girl thoughtfully, and that she could think of Kennard's suffering rather than Sullivan's devotion, gave him another throb of jealousy. "Suppose that he—he—he loves me as much as you imagine, if he believed I was there, suffering as you say, cannot you think of the awful agony of the man who had to leave me behind. You don't think him a coward, do you?" she added appealingly; she had lived long enough in the West to realize that no man could suffer that charge and retain any one's respect.

"No," was the grudging answer, wrung from the unwilling cattleman. "I 'll take that back if I see him; that is, if he gives me a chance!"

"Gives you a chance?"

"Yes; I have no doubt he 'll shoot me on sight, or try to, and if we ever get out alive, since

you love him, I won't hinder him," he added bitterly.

"I will prevent that," said the woman, quite forgetting poor Sullivan for Kennard, "and my heart is wrung for him. It is an awful thing to brand as a coward a man of honor, a brave man, because he has been brought up from his youth to put duty before all the other things in the world, even before a woman when he loves her. I cannot understand how you could say that to a man who has had instilled in every fiber of his being the qualities that go to make a loyal soldier."

"He chose between obeying his orders and possibly sacrificing the woman he loved," was the curt rejoinder.

"Yes, and I can see him now. I can feel for him. You ought to understand that his heart broke there in the box cañon. I don't believe he even thought about your calling him a coward. He must have been thinking about me. Where is he now?"

The girl's words came brokenly. At last she put her head down in her hands and began to weep softly.

"Good God! Miss Amy," burst out the rancher at last. "Don't. I can't bear to see you cry! I wish he were here. I 'd take it all back. He did right according to his lights, I suppose. Thank God! they ain't my lights, but that is neither here nor there."

"It is all so hopeless," said the girl through her tears. "Our food is gone. I am sick, starved, broken. You are wounded, helpless. What can we do? Who will protect us now?"

"It ain't for the likes of me to speak of such things to the likes of you," answered the big cattleman, slowly and gravely, "but I knew you when you were a child. I remember once coming into your room at night to see the Colonel about an important matter that could n't wait, and your father was sitting down on the bed, and you were kneeling by him, a tiny girl, in your little white gown, saying your prayers. Can't you pray now? You do that and I will work." —The old, old combination, Sullivan; the irresistible combination of faith and works!—"If they will let us alone until nightfall I will try to get out of here. The soldiers, I take it, must have fallen back. They will be in the vicinity

of Tear Lake. My legs are all right if my hands are more or less useless. I will get word to them somehow."

"I have prayed," sobbed the girl, "day after day, hour by hour, and nobody seems to hear!"

"Perhaps God brought me to you, Miss Amy," responded the other clumsily, as is the habit of men in such discourse. "I can hold that entrance yonder for a while at least, and perhaps rescue is coming this way. It is not in my Irish heart to despair. You have been preserved unharmed so far."

"Yes, thank God!" answered the girl, looking at him through her tears.

"There, that 's right; when you begin to thank Him, it will be easy to pray to Him."

"You are right," said the woman.

She had been sitting by his side. She got to her knees, and there in the rude shelter in the rocks, alone, save for the savage woman and a bruised, sorely stricken man, the girl poured out her soul to God in humble petition for the extension of His love and His care over the wounded and the helpless and the forsaken.

It was very still in the little cave in the cliff

after that. None cared to break the silence. They were, it might almost be said, listening for a response to the petition. It was the ever-practical Mah-wissa who moved first. The canteen was empty. She limped to the spring which flowed in the cave near the entrance and stooped to fill it. As she did so, she got a straight lookout through the entrance far down the valley. Across the range of her vision there swept a plumed and painted figure and then many more. Carefully filling the canteen, she turned back to where the other two sat.

"They come," she said laconically, handing the vessel of cool water to the thirsty, fevered man.

"Is that the answer to our prayer?" asked the girl with a burst of hysterical laughter.

"No," said Sullivan, sternly rebuking her, and by the strangeness of his words giving her strength and much encouragement. "You prayed for protection and help. I am the answer. Give God a chance! Give me a chance!"

God and man together! the ancient association to which all things are possible. What

could they two do for her. Well, the girl should see.

Meanwhile, Sullivan got to his feet, the women helping him. With his left hand he clutched the barrel of the Winchester. It would be time enough to put the torn fingers of his right hand about it when the compelling need approached more imminently. So long as he could he would spare the other hand. Then he slowly staggered through the pass until he stood well within the entrance, sheltered from attack and concealed from observation save from one, to the Indians, almost impossible point of view.

"What are you going to do now?" asked Amy who, with Mah-wissa, had followed him.

"By God's help I am going to keep them out of here until —"

He paused significantly. The girl nodded.

"I shall know what to do then," she answered simply, quite understanding the meaning of his silence.

"Very well. When they come on, you get back in the cave with the squaw."

"Yes. Have they seen us yet?"

"Not yet, but it won't take them long to find us. For one thing, we left a trail of blood from the place where I fell over the cliffs, and then that Indian saw us headed in this direction."

He pointed out into the light. From the obscurity of the cave the maneuvers of the Indians were easily visible. There must have been half a hundred of them, passing and repassing. The Half Breed was easily a leader among them.

"He has brought the whole village down on us," muttered Sullivan. "God, if I only had a gun that would shoot!" He looked at the damaged Winchester trailing by his side. "I could make short work of him anyway and it would be some satisfaction to send him to hell ahead of me."

"You are not going there," said Amy Benham, quickly.

"I am going to die all right; we all of us are."

"Yes, but you will die for me," and the girl whispered gently, "*'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.'*"

"Who said that?"

"Our Lord."

There was a long pause which was suddenly broken by Mah-wissa.

"Me go out," she said.

"No," answered Sullivan, "you stay here. If Miss Amy fails, you make sure they do not get her alive."

The squaw nodded. She understood. At that instant a chorus of yells burst from the Indians. They had discovered the trail. It was easy to see where it pointed. They clustered about it and stared.

Sullivan drew back, but not quickly enough. They got a glimpse of him in the narrow pass, framed on one side by the face of the cliff, and on the other by the high rampart of bowlders, steep and sharp enough to prevent any one of the Indians from climbing over. Neither could they get to the top of the cliff and thence shoot down upon him on account of the overhanging of the face. Indeed, the cliff and bowlders of the outer wall almost met—did meet in some places over his head—so as to make the little narrow pass a penthouse. Given arms, it was

the sort of a place one man could have held against a thousand. Alas, Sullivan had no weapons, save those nature gave him. Well, he would make a good fight with those.

CHAPTER XXI

THE BERSERKER

"THE battle's on," said the cattleman; "they have seen us."

As he spoke there was a crashing volley from the open. They heard the bullets ring against the wall. Splinters of stone flew in all directions, but the cave dwellers had drawn back behind a turn in the pass and they remained unscathed.

"Safe so far!" cried Sullivan, almost cheerily.

The old ineradicable leaven of the flesh, the lust of fighting, was getting back into his veins, renewing his strength, and giving him the vigor of which his many wounds had drained him. He turned and looked at the woman he loved.

"I would like to stay and fight by your side," she said, her bosom heaving, her breath coming short and quick, her eyes shining, the contagion of his spirit upon her.

"It can't be. You would only hamper me. I want all the room there is. You must go back!"

"I obey," said the girl.

"But before she did so, she stepped toward him, caught him by the shoulder, and it was the wounded shoulder she grasped unwittingly, but he did not feel the pain in the great rush of feeling that swept over him as she lifted her face and kissed him.

"Good-by; you are a brave man. God won't forget!"

She clung to him an instant and was gone.

A new man indeed, as well as a brave one, Sullivan stepped toward the entrance and sought such concealment as was possible to him.

Through crevices and crannies in the rocks he could see what was going on. Necessarily he ran the risk of a stray bullet searching out some crack and hitting him, but the hazard of that was not great.

The Indians, directed by the Half Breed with considerable skill, had scattered in various directions, and from all sides a perfect storm of bullets now poured into the mouth of the

miniature pass. It would have meant instant death to any one who had stood in view. They kept this up for some minutes until finally the vain fusillade died away.

This attack, if such it might be called, was met with utter and absolute silence. Not a sound came from the cave in the hills save the dying echoes of the quick volleys. This puzzled the Indians greatly. They consulted together and finally a little body detached itself from the line, took cover behind bowlders lying against the side of the cliffs, and cautiously moved forward toward the entrance.

The attack was coming, thought the cattleman, nerving himself to meet the onset. But none came; with wild whoops and yells, the Indians suddenly darted from cover and dashed wildly squarely across the opening. As they passed outside of the line of fire, another volley smote against the rocks and rang through the twisted pass.

The ruse was so patent that Sullivan laughed grimly, as he thought about it. They hoped to draw his fire, and they were willing to risk their lives in order to get him to step out into

the opening where they could shoot him down. Two or three times this maneuver was repeated, and of course, without avail, since he had neither rifle nor revolver.

More consultation followed. What it would result in he could not tell; yet, he did not relax his vigilance for a moment. It was well that he remained on the alert, for suddenly there burst into full sight, around the rocks to the left of the buttress wall, an Indian, Winchester in hand. He appeared in the opening with startling suddenness. He had been detached from the right flank of the Indians and had crept up to the buttress wall, and counted upon killing the man, whom he supposed to be in the entrance, by taking him by surprise when he sprang into view. As he appeared, he fired point blank into the entrance.

Into the smoke of the discharge Sullivan leaped. He clasped the barrel of the gun with both hands now. How he got his wounded, shattered fingers around it he could not have told, but fury made him ignore the pain, and before the Indian could repeat his shot, he brought his war club—the weapon of the cave

man, his forbear—crashing down on his assailant's head. The stock, already broken, splintered under the fierce blow, which tore through the feathered headdress the Indian wore, and beat out his brains. There was only the barrel left in the rancher's hand, which would be of advantage to him in a hand to hand fight, which must certainly follow, on account of the limited space in which to swing his weapon.

The ground sloped sharply from the entrance, and although the rancher made a quick grasp at the Indian's Winchester, his blow had been so terrific that the savage was fairly hurled down the slope; he fell at its foot, clasping the rifle in his dead hand, and quite out of reach.

For a moment, Sullivan was in plain view through the smoke. The Indians saw the warrior fall and lie motionless. An instant discharge rang out. A bullet grazed the man's cheek. Another cut through the fleshy part of his leg. Neither, however, shook him. Before they could repeat the fire, he was back in safety.

The detonation of the Indian's shot, fired into

the narrow pass, had roared in the women's ears like Alpine thunder.

"Sullivan!" exclaimed Amy Benham in terrible anxiety.

"I 've killed the first one!" he answered in notes of triumph.

"Are you hurt?"

"Scratches. What are you doing?"

"Praying!"

"Good! You pray and I 'll fight like hell."

His words were drowned by another volley. The Indians, seeing that no return shots were fired, had come boldly into the open. The Half Breed surmised that the man was weaponless, and they were approaching the mouth of the cave, recklessly exposing themselves, and firing as they came. Some of the less hardy among them were still taking such cover as the rocks afforded, but as no return shots came, they also grew bolder. Finally they stepped indifferently into the open, and under cover of the smoke, with wild warwhoops the whole body rushed toward the mouth of the pass. As the firing died out, Sullivan cried out:

"They are coming! Good-by! Remember!"

"Let me go to him," cried Amy, but the Indian woman threw herself upon her white sister and wrestled with her.

"He say no; you stay here!" she panted as they struggled.

Outside the air was filled with noise. Inside there was silence for a space. Presently, however, the cattleman gave tongue.

"Come on!" he cried. "And you, Girot! You Half Breed hound! Give me a chance at you, you murderer, you woman stealer!"

His voice suddenly stopped. The listeners heard the thud of falling blows. Shrieks of pain mingled with yells of agony and savage imprecations. The cattleman's voice rang hoarsely again after a few moments of awful suspense.

"They 're getting me! I can't hold out much longer!"

What was happening at the mouth of the little pass? This! The first Indian that stuck his painted face into the entrance received a thrust in the mouth from the pointed gun barrel that nearly tore his head from his shoulders. He did not have time to fall backward, for the surge of the others behind compelled him to pitch for-

ward. Springing from cover with a leap like that of the primitive cave bear, Big Sullivan, with a roar of rage, flung himself on the hurling mass. Knives were drawn, tomahawks were raised, one revolver cracked in the mêlée, but the gun barrel rose and fell like a flail beating down the heads of grain.

The pass was narrow and not more than three could stand abreast, and these were hampered in their movements. Fortunate for the defense was that sharp slope of the ground downward and away from the entrance, so that the big rancher stood a little above them, making it the more difficult for them to come to him. He thought he would surely be overwhelmed when he called to Amy, but no, the pressure on him suddenly relaxed.

It was not in human nature, and especially Indian nature, which does not love such close fighting, to withstand so terrible a beating as he was giving them, and presently, leaving four of their number senseless or dead, and dragging two shattered and broken bodies after them, the Indians broke and gave back from the pass where Sullivan, swaying and staggering, bleeding from

a dozen wounds, his gun barrel covered with blood and matted hair and bits of flesh, still kept his feet, triumphant, unconquerable. As they turned to fire on him, he sought his old place of shelter once more.

"Miss Amy!" he cried, "are you there still?"

"Waiting," answered the girl, "knife in hand."

"Don't drive it home until you hear from me, or until I am silent. Do you understand?"

"Yes, God bless you!"

"They 're coming again!"

Moved by an uncontrollable impulse of daring and recklessness, the tide of fighting blood at full flood, and knowing now that it was for the last time, as the Indians, this time led by the Half Breed, made another mad rush for the pass, Sullivan sprang out of it. He set his back against the cliff wall and confronted them, a gory and frightful figure. His shirt had been torn from his breast in the wild struggle. Down the white surface of his massive chest blood streamed and streaked it; sweat matted his hair; blood scored his cheek. He dripped with life, and yet he faced them in erect, undaunted silence, their Master! It was the stone age, plus lingering

remnants of higher civilization not yet entirely sloughed off, facing the stone age, naked and unashamed. They could kill him, they could not conquer him.

If he had only stood out in the open before he would have been shot to pieces, but the red men coming forward had left their guns behind and, with one exception, had resorted to the primitive weapons for the last great fight. And even as he, the red lust of battle possessed them as they came slowly crowding on, like the white man, ominously and unusually silent for the few remaining seconds before the battle was joined.

"You, Girot!" growled Sullivan at last. "You come first!"

He had time to say no more before the whole body precipitated themselves upon him. He did not wait their onslaught. Girot had so maneuvered as to be behind two others. The gun barrel fell crashing upon the neck of one, and he was done for; and although the next Indian stabbed the cattleman full in the side, he was knocked down like a batted ball by a mighty sweep of the club of steel. The next second, casting away his club, and resorting to the oldest

weapon of all, his naked hands, like a storm beating against a wall, the big Berserker leaped upon the Half Breed, receiving from him a shot in the breast as he did so. There was not time to press the revolver trigger again.

The mongrel struck him over the head with a hatchet as he came on, but that leap could no more be stopped than the human hand could stay the avalanche. Winding his great arms about the Half Breed, crushing him relentlessly against his bloody breast, seizing him in a very death grip, the cattleman fell with his enemy locked in his loving embrace in the midst of a confused heap of Indians. They reeled over and over on the rocks, writhing in a death grapple and agony, while the savages crowded around and strove in desperate hurry and confusion to stab the white conqueror.

In the mouth of the pass, Amy with Mahwissa watched the scene horror stricken. When Sullivan had leaped outside, Amy, at last breaking from the Indian woman's detaining grasp, had run to the entrance. She stood there, her right hand clutching the knife, waiting. She saw Sullivan's last mad, splendid rush. She

saw him clutch the Half Breed. She saw them go down in the midst of the multitude of hurtling, yelling, stabbing, frenzied figures. Then, and not till then, did she raise the knife. With her left hand she tore open her ragged waist, exposing her white bosom to the light.

"Show me where!" she said to the Indian woman.

. "Here!" answered Mah-wissa, laying her brown fingers over her sister's throbbing heart.

CHAPTER XXII

"OVER THE RANGE"

FOR one second she stayed her hand; for one blessed second. No one had yet noticed her. There would still be time. As she waited, reluctant to drive home her knife, another sound broke suddenly on her ear. Cheers! good, hearty, American cheers! Faint yet distinct she heard them. No angel voices ever sounded sweeter to human hearing than they!

Reckless of consequences now, she sprang clear of the entrance and looked down the valley. A few hundred yards away horsemen were approaching at a wild gallop. Rifle shots volleyed. The writhing group over the two prostrate figures dissolved as if by magic. Bullets tore through them. Savages shrieked and fell. The surviving Indians turned and fled to their ponies.

The Half Breed disengaged himself with one final mighty wrench from the failing grasp of the cattleman and struggled to his feet. He was

the last to arise. Although he was last and therefore nearest to the swift, approaching horsemen, so that his chances of escape were poorest, envenomed with hate, he took time to grind his moccasined heel into the other's bloody face. He had lost every weapon save the revolver that hung at his waist. He drew it with incredible quickness, fired one shot at the two women, now in plain view, and another at the nearest white man. Neither took effect. He could not wait for a second try. He leaped to his pony and raced up the valley after the flying Indians.

A blue-coated figure, straining forward on a madly galloping horse on the Half Breed's trail, swept by the two women as a lightning flash. A wave of his hand and he was gone.

The place of battle was at once filled with a tumultuous crowd of cheering, yelling men galloping like fiends after the big bay horse on which Kennard far in the lead rode in pursuit of the escaping Indians. There was such joy, such exultation in his heart—for he had recognized her, she was safe—as made him fairly lift the great bay thoroughbred through the air.

In their effort to escape, the Indians naturally scattered, hoping thus to divide the chase and increase their chances. The rough riders did the same, each man coolly selecting his particular quarry. They were all aware that there was probably no exit through which a fugitive could gain the upland before being overtaken, and each man, having marked the woman, was fairly drunk with the lust of the fight, to kill those who had brought them to this strait. They ran like hounds at the end of the hunt, eager to be in at the death, all thoughts merged in the mad desire to slay, kill!

If the Half Breed had thought to insure his own safety by his own skill, or the swiftness of his own steed, he was soon undeceived. Well mounted as he was, his horse was not built for such a wild burst of speed as the Captain's blooded animal was exhibiting. In a long chase the Indian pony would have won, but this was to be a short flight, and in such the thoroughbred's pace would serve the purpose better than the other horse's endurance. Indeed, such was the desperate determination of the soldier, thanking God as he rode, that if his horse had been

made of wood, his own energy would have forced it on.

He was rapidly overtaking the Half Breed. The latter turned in his saddle and surveyed his pursuer, a sickening sense of fear filling his soul, the more terrible because he had thought it so impossible that he could be caught. A half hour before he had been sure that he would dispose of the cattleman easily and at last possess the girl. And he had planned to mete out to her such treatment as he brutally fancied she merited. He would have no pity for her. But the tables were turned in the twinkling of an eye. And he imagined that it would be by torture that his life would now be forfeited. Sweat, cold, clammy, beaded his brow. His beating heart was like to choke him. His cold hand fumbled at his holster. He finally managed to draw from it his revolver. There were still three shots left in it. Facing backward he fired twice in rapid succession. Aiming was difficult, however, and both shots missed. The pursuer was coming up, was almost upon him now.

Observing that no one else was pursuing him, he came to a sudden resolution. Swerving to

one side, he threw his horse violently back on its haunches, nearly breaking its legs in the process as he did so. He leaped to his feet, and as Kennard bore down upon him, he fired his last shot. Kennard, realizing instantly what was toward swung his horse into the air by a lift of his powerful arm. The bullet struck the gallant thoroughbred full in the chest. His race was over. Fully prepared, Kennard plunged to one side, disengaging his feet from the stirrups, and as the horse fell forward, he leaped to the ground.

The two men confronted each other, the soldier revolver in hand. The Half Breed, several shades whiter than he had ever been before, stood composedly enough outwardly, awaiting the doom so surely coming. Yet he had not altogether given up hope. It is the disadvantage of the gentleman, endowed with all the finer feelings, in dealing with the blackguard who has none, that one is susceptible to appeal to that honor which the other does not possess.

"I 've got you at last!" gritted out Kennard, raising his revolver, "and now you 'll pay!"

Instantly the Half Breed widely opened his arms and showed his empty hands.

"I am unarmed, Monsieur," he courteously remonstrated,—singular how he could sometimes look like a gentleman! "Would you shoot a defenseless man?"

"By God!" cried the Captain, passionately, dropping his revolver to his feet, his face convulsed by all the accumulated fury and hate of the week, "I don't need anything but my naked hands for a murderer and an abductor of women!"

The Half Breed laughed easily. Those mordant words did not touch him. His appeal was being met as he would have it. The next moment the soldier was upon him. Kennard was of slight build; his appearance more delicate than his real strength. The Half Breed, who had just sustained the grapple of a giant like Sullivan, fancied contemptuously, that he could easily dispose of the much less mighty soldier, but hate long entertained, despair long indulged, hope suddenly enjoyed, transformed the white man. And the pure blood, as ever, was to master that which was mixed and debased. That sneering laugh was the last that ever broke from the lips of the mongrel. The two closed instantly, the

Half Breed biting and snarling like a tiger cat, while the soldier did his fighting silently but terribly.

Kennard had been a famous wrestler at the Point. Presently he caught the Half Breed, who knew little of the game and had trusted to brute strength and agility, in a desperate and unbreakable lock. Although the latter clung to the American with the tightness of the writhing python to its would-be victim, Kennard, slowly, steadily, irresistibly tore him loose, and by an effort that even the herculean Sullivan could not have bettered, suddenly, with one final mighty wrench lifted him in the air. The bitterness of defeat and death were in the Half Breed's heart for one swift second as the soldier ruthlessly flung him far from him, to fall crushed, bruised, broken, dying on the rocks below.

The man was still alive, when Kennard, pale, panting for breath, his clothing torn by the violence of the brief struggle, bent over him. He was unconscious, however, his back was broken, his head was crushed; he would soon die. Kennard composed the limbs of his dying antagonist, and stood watching him until one of his men rode

up. Shots here and there throughout the valley indicated what was happening elsewhere.

"Are you all right, Cap'n?" the man approaching cried anxiously.

"Yes," was the answer, as the officer turned and faced old Johnson.

"Who have you got there? By God! it 's the Half Breed!" He leaped from his horse as he spoke, and drew his pistol. "I 'll finish him."

Kennard interposed with a quiet word of command.

"He is finished now. Don't shoot him. His back is broken and his head crushed."

"Might as well put him out of his misery then," sneered the other in a mockery in which there was no pity.

The soldier shook his head.

"Stay here with him till he dies. You promise me you won't shoot him?"

"Why, what the hell!—"

"You promise me! Remember you are under orders!"

"Oh, very well," Johnson answered sulkily. "I 'll nuss him like a sick baby 'til he goes to hell, damn him!"

"When he is dead, come back and tell me. May I have your horse?"

Then, with nerves wrung, his heart throbbing from the wild adventure, Kennard unsteadily mounted the other's horse.

"Be you hurt, Cap'n?" asked Johnson somewhat anxiously.

"No, why?"

"You look so white and—"

"I had a hard tussle with him."

"I seen it," said the cowboy; "I 'd just finished my particular buck"—he lifted a gory scalp from his belt—"an' I noticed you strugglin' with him. I seen you pick him up and throw him from you like a ball. God! It was magnificent! Sullivan, himself, could n't have done better."

"Where is he, by the way?"

"I don't know."

"You saw the women?"

"Yep, Miss Benham and a squaw."

"They looked all right?"

"All right to me."

The weary Captain started the weary horse back toward the cave. There was a little group

around it when he drew rein and slipped down. Mah-wissa stood at the foot of a gory, gigantic figure, a mass of blood and rags, save his face, which Amy Benham, with the sleeve torn from her waist, had washed free from blood with the water her Indian sister brought. Kennard recognized his rival at once. There was that in Sullivan's condition which obliterated all rancor, all resentment, all earthly strife of whatsoever degree.

"Thank God!" cried the Captain fervently, stepping near them, "that we have found you!"

Amy Benham, who was sitting on the ground with Sullivan's head on her knee, looked up, her eyes swimming with tears, an expression on her countenance that no man could mistake. Even the dying Sullivan saw it.

"You see," he faltered, "your prayers did count."

"Yes," said the woman softly, "my prayers and your fighting."

"It was a good fight," said the big rancher, "eh, Captain?"

"Such a fight as I have never heard of," answered Kennard heartily. "There were eight

dead Indians lying about on the slope! Did you kill them all?"

"If I 'd had any other weapon than a busted gun I could have done better."

"You did heroically with what you had! How do you feel?"

"I 'm done for."

"As bad as that!" asked the soldier, kneeling down and laying his hand upon the other man's wrist.

"All in," said the cattleman, faintly. He closed his eyes for a moment. "The Half Breed?" he broke out suddenly.

"I got him!" answered Kennard concisely.

"I did my best to kill him. They were too many for me. Is he dead?"

"Yes," said old Johnson, at this moment dismounting from a pony he had caught and upon which he had ridden up unobserved. "He died cursing you all."

"And you?" asked the Captain.

"I let him curse on. How is it with you, Pat?" he continued, kneeling by his old friend, his face working with grief he could not repress.

"It is well with me, I guess," was the answer. "Kennard," he spoke with sudden sharpness, "I called you a coward. I 'm sorry!"

"That from as brave a man as you are," said Kennard gently, "is more than enough."

"Miss Amy," said Sullivan, with a little smile on his lips, "you kissed me before the battle in the pass—I 'm going now—will you kiss me again? Kennard won't mind."

"No," said Kennard quickly.

Amy shifted her position and bent over and kissed him softly on the lips, the tears raining upon his face as she did so. On either side Kennard and Johnson knelt. Back of the party Mah-wissa stood with folded arms, the canteen lying at her feet. Around the dying man lay the gory trophies of his prowess. Cattleman, rough riders, seeing the little group, rode up from here and there, dismounted, took off their hats and stood staring in awe-struck grief. The ranch boss noticed them, smiled faintly at them, even lifted his hand toward them in a brave gesture of farewell.

"Won't some one—say—a prayer?" faltered Sullivan at last, and from Amy Benham's lips

slowly fell these solemn yet broken words on the still air—the old familiar prayer of commendation for the dying.

How glad she was that she had been made to learn that and most of the other prayers of her dear Church by heart when she was a child.

"O Almighty God, with whom do live the spirits of just men made perfect, after they are delivered from their earthly prisons: We humbly commend the soul of this thy servant, our dear brother, into thy hands, as into the hands of a faithful Creator, and most merciful Saviour; most humbly beseeching thee, that it may be precious in thy sight"—

The white-faced woman, the dark, stern visage of Mah-wissa, Kennard's troubled face, Johnson's rough countenance working, the rough, awe-struck men grouped about, some of them wet-eyed, the savage dead in their gay apparel, making vivid spots of color on the brown rock. The woman's voice faltered on—

"Wash it, we pray thee, in the blood of that immaculate Lamb, that was slain to take away the sins of the world, that whatsoever defilements it may have contracted in the midst of this miserable and naughty world, through the lusts of the flesh, or the wiles of Satan, being purged and done away, it may be presented pure and without spot before thee; through the merits of Jesus Christ, thine only Son, our Lord."

Sullivan opened his eyes at last. He turned his head and gazed fixedly into the face of the woman he loved; the voice that had gone on so slowly repeating the old prayer graven in her heart, stopped.

"Amen!" said the big man suddenly, collapsing in her arms.

Amen indeed! What had the girl said to him ere he ventured his life in that last great effort for her in the pass:

"Greater love hath no man than this; that a man lay down his life for his friends."

And that was thy epitaph, O Man of the Great West, there in the dying day in that lost valley.

CHAPTER XXIII

BELOVED

THE day was now far spent. The soul of the cattleman had gone out with the set of the sun. The night would soon be at hand. In the saddle since four in the morning, Kennard's men had had a long and exhausting ride and a hard fight at the end of it. The women were in no condition to travel without food and rest; which they could now take in security for the first time in many days. Their presence constituted a problem with which Kennard was not prepared to deal on the spur of the moment. He wanted time for reflection before determining what to do with them and his command. Therefore he decided to make camp for the night where he was in the valley.

A quick muster of the men disclosed the fact that two of them were not present. Detailing a strong party under Chambers to search the valley and ascertain what had become of them if

possible, he directed the rest to move down to the river, picket the horses, kindle a fire, cook supper and prepare to pass the night.

These orders were soon carried out, haversacks were opened, and presently the fragrant aroma of boiling coffee and frying bacon indicated that the rude frontier meal was being made ready. Under other circumstances Amy Benham would have been so crushed by the death of her friend, that she would have been unable to eat, but her hunger and that of her red sister was positively wolfish. Almost every other emotion was merged and lost in the frantic animal craving for food.

She had indeed collapsed physically after the farewell of Sullivan. She had gone through so many and such varied emotions in that day and the days preceding. She had looked death so closely in the face in the last hour and these things had come as a culmination to the hard experiences of the past week. She could scarcely contain herself. She was completely unwomaned. Helpless, weak, sick and hungry —starved!

Kennard's emotions when he began to take

thought about the present situation were decidedly mixed. There was great joy in his heart that she had been rescued unharmed. There was an intense satisfaction that he had been permitted to execute that vengeance so richly merited on the Half Breed. There was sincere and genuine regret over the loss of the splendid man who had died for the woman he loved, and there was a fierce pang of jealousy lest that same woman's heart would be buried in the grave with the departed hero.

His manner with her was, nevertheless, as tender as that of a woman. She was not a heroine of romance in her appearance at least. Her clothing—she had worn a light summer gown on that eventful morning—was stained and soiled. It hung in rags about her. Her poor little feet, save for ragged bandages, were bare. She was spattered with blood. She was gaunt and haggard from her exposure and anxiety. Her beautiful hair hung in a matted mass over her brow. She was a pitiable spectacle. Yet, he loved her. He worshiped the ground she trod upon. He would have given the world to take her poor little bruised and bleeding feet

in his hands and kiss them well again. She was a child to him. She clung to him in her weakness as a child might have done. She suffered him to do what he would for her.

There was no surgeon with the command to care for her. Finally he, himself, with the assistance of Mah-wissa, brought from his saddlebags, woolen socks which he bound around her feet after washing them and applying such soothing compound to her bruises as the medicine chest afforded. From some of the dead Indians they secured moccasins for her. His own blanket he put at her disposal. She could have had the blankets of the whole troop if she had but said the word.

When the meal was over, he himself fed her sparingly, gradually satisfying her appetite. He did not presume to speak one word of love to her, but she was not so devoid of her usual keenness of perception as not to see in every action, in every word, his unbounded and overwhelming devotion, and she was neither so tired nor so wretched as to be insensible to it. Indeed, in spite of her misery, she thrilled to it. To be cared for with such exceeding tenderness

filled her soul with satisfaction that was more grateful and helpful to her than rest.

After the supper, which she thought all too scanty for her needs, but which was as much as he dared to give her, and after drinking a fragrant cup of coffee which had been handed to her, she felt better, and the change manifested itself first of all in her anxiety over her appearance. He had a few necessaries in his saddlebags: a pocket comb, a piece of soap, a handkerchief or two. Mah-wissa and she went back to the cave and when she came back into the firelight she looked another woman. The tangled hair was coiled neatly, a handkerchief was bound round her neck. With his housewife she had effected some change in her torn and tattered bodice. She walked with a firmer step, putting out her hand to him frankly and freely where he stood waiting for her between the mountains and the camp.

There was one duty still to be performed. He feared it would be a hard duty for her, yet it must be done. Chambers' party had returned, bearing with them the bodies of two of the white men, whose hard fortune it had been to meet

death at the hands of those they pursued. One or two others had been slightly wounded, yet not severely enough to prevent their going on in the morning if necessary.

So far as the scouting party could tell, few, if any, of the Indians had escaped. The place was full of dead bodies. There must have been two-score of them. They would have to be left where they were. Under the circumstances, it was necessary to bury where they fell the men of their own command who had been killed, and do it without delay. There was no way of carrying the dead. The merciless demands of the living must be thought of first. Sullivan, too, would have to lie with his friends in the valley he had immortalized by his valor. Kennard told her this gently and she said she must see it all.

Kennard was a Churchman. In his pocket he always carried a little Book of Common Prayer. The camp had been pitched by the side of the river, over a mile from the bluffs, and right in the middle of the amphitheater. The river was a shallow stream; its sandy bed, almost devoid of water, was about one hundred and

fifty yards wide. Near where they camped there was a low island with a tall, magnificent pine tree, solitary, at the upper and higher end. The island was fronted and covered with undergrowth. The water, not knee deep, flowed around it on either side. Between the water and the banks were broad expanses of hard, fine sand.

Kennard would have preferred to bury Sullivan and his two men under the bluffs, but the country was of rock there, and he finally selected the spot on the island at the foot of the gigantic pine which, standing alone as it did, was a not unworthy indication of the strong, great man destined to lie beneath its evergreen branches.

It was dark now. With their big hunting knives, their tin pans, coffee cups, whatever they had, the men working hard scraped out three graves, Sullivan's in the middle and the two others who had died in his rescue on either side. When all was ready pine torches were kindled. Kennard took his place under the great tree and read the touching service for the burial of the dead, Amy Benham by his side, Mah-wissa standing back of her, looking, in the flickering uncertain light, like a brown shadow, the torches

smoking and flaring, illuminating the serious, intent faces of the men grouped about.

They wrapped the bodies in the blankets of the dead Indians and gently laid them away. The woman's tears fell silently as the Captain slowly repeated the solemn words of the ancient ritual. They had put in the big rancher's hands, she noticed before they covered him up, the gun-barrel, blood-stained and dented, with which he had fought his way into eternity, for her. When the graves had been covered, the men working as if they had gone through, in the long day since four o'clock in the morning, nothing but simple play, had brought huge stones and made three long heaps over each body, lest by any chance the wolves would come and desecrate the graves.

Then, and not until then, did they leave the low little island, and take up their places upon the grassy banks and compose themselves to sleep. There were plenty of blankets, captured and otherwise, and in a sheltered spot beneath the stars, Kennard had made a place for Amy Benham to lie. He kissed her hand as he bowed low before her and bade her good night.

He would have moved away but she detained him.

Her place was somewhat removed from the main body of the camp and the fires. It was pitch dark now. There was only Mah-wissa to see. The woman came to a sudden resolution. She stepped close to him, her body thrilling, her bosom heaving from his touch, her eyes shining in the faint radiance of the distant fires, like the bright stars in the dark heaven above. He could see her face faintly lovely in the starry night.

"I kissed him," she said, "because he was dying!"

"Yes."

He spoke gently enough but his own pulses were leaping.

"I kiss you because you are alive and because you have found me."

Boldly she suited action to word, and then as he suddenly swept her close to his heart, he strained her to him, giving back kisses for kisses in a perfect flood of love and feeling.

"Amy! Amy!" he whispered brokenly, "how I love you!"

She drew her lips away a little after a while and laid her head on his breast, and broke into a passion of weeping. He pressed her head gently, stroked her hair tenderly, and whispered soothing words to her. She clung to him weak and trembling.

"Oh, thank God!" she faltered at last, "that you came; that you have me now; that I am here with you. You will never let me go, will you? No one shall take me away from you again. I have no one but you now. Sullivan has gone, and my father—"

"To take you for my own has been the one wish of my heart since I first knew you," murmured the man passionately, holding her tight as if he would never release her again. "I was on my way to ask you to be my wife that morning when the news came. I could have killed myself in the cañon when I had to go back!"

"Sullivan told me," said the girl, suddenly now become all a woman. "You did right. I am a soldier's daughter. Your duty first."

"No," exclaimed the man, "you first!"

After a little while he tore himself away, although she would fain have held him with her,

reluctant to let him go; but he knew that she must have sleep, and so he bade her lie down, exacting a promise from her that she would do her best to get rest.

A long time she lay staring in gratitude up at the stars, until by and by she fell into the deep and dreamless slumber of security and content. Kennard seemed made of iron. From a little distance, in the darkness he watched her, drawing nearer after a time. Finding she was asleep, he approached her closely, bent over her, listening to her gentle, placid breathing. All was well with her, thank God!

Colonel Morris, to whom the duty had been committed, had seen that sentries were properly placed. Roman Nose could not have got so far away as to be out of striking distance, and no one knew what other bands of savages there might be roving about. For that reason the camp in the open had been chosen, where they could fight or fly with reasonable prospects of success, if necessary.

Kennard visited these outposts, chatting a moment informally, observing as he spoke that good watch was kept, leaving each man with a

friendly word of caution and encouragement, and seeing to it himself that proper reliefs were arranged. Presently he went back, spread his blanket some little distance away from Amy Benham, but at her feet, and with his face turned toward where she lay, dropped instantly into the sound sleep of the tired soldier.

The dawn was graying in the east when he was suddenly awakened. He rose on his elbow with a sense of having received an alarm. As he did so, he heard a shot, and then a shrill voice crying:

"Injins! Injins! My God! Look at 'em!"

He recognized the voice as that of Meekins. The scout was on his feet some distance ahead, near one of the sentries, who had just discharged his rifle. He was pointing off to the right, and as he did so, his arm swept around until it extended straight up the valley.

Kennard by this time was on his feet, staring at the bluffs, finding them fairly alive with savages, silhouetted against the gray sky. They could be made out quite plainly, although the distance was so great. His eyes followed Meekins' gesture to the northward. A half mile

ahead of the camp the river flowed from a thick clump of trees. From these trees great bodies of mounted Indians, seen less distinctly in the dim light, were fast debouching. They were coming down toward the river at a rapid gait. A glance told him there were none off to the left, the westward, apparently. At least, not yet.

CHAPTER XXIV

BELEAGUERED

WHAT was to be done now? Kennard had to think hard and fast on the instant.

"Get the horses," he cried, but as he did so, a hideous commotion arose from the makeshift corral where most of the horses were tied in a long line. There was a wild plunging and rearing. One horse tore himself loose, then the line broke and the whole body of horses and pack mules galloped madly in every direction. Two Indians, creeping down the river, had stampeded them. These two daring braves paid for their enterprise. They were shot dead instantly. Had it not been for the main body of warriors in the valley ahead the horses could have been regained easily enough, but it was too risky to attempt such a thing under the circumstances. A few of the horses tethered elsewhere were saved for a little space.

"The mules with the ammunition!" cried Kennard. "Somebody look out for them!"

As he spoke, two rifle shots rang out in quick succession. Meekins! The mules had gone with the rest! It so happened that the man whose business it was to pack them, knowing that four o'clock was the appointed hour for breaking camp, had arisen betimes and had just finished getting the ammunition chests on the three mules and the medicine chest on the fourth. He had left them for a moment, unfortunately, to return to the camp, and they had fled when the other horses stampeded. The precious ammunition would all have been lost, save for what the men carried on their persons, had it not been for the quick thinking of the old scout. Knowing how impossible it would be to catch the mules, he had shot two of the galloping animals, upon whom he could draw a bead as yet, dead instantly. The third and fourth got clear away.

The dead mules lay some distance to the westward.

"Well done, Meekins!" cried Kennard, now thoroughly master of himself and of the situation. "Volunteers to get those ammunition

boxes, four men to each box and one to command. You, Chambers? Select your eight men. Now, gentlemen, get in ranks. Miss Benham?"

"I am here," said the girl, standing, with Mah-wissa, by his side. "Are we in any danger?"

"Not while any of us live. Steady, men! Keep cool! They won't rush us right away! Morris?"

"Yes, sir."

"Johnson!"

"Here!"

"What do you think of it?"

"There must be six hundred warriors, if there is one!" cried Morris.

"Right," exclaimed Meekins.

"Looks bad," said Johnson coolly, "but we are here to do what you say."

"We will cross the river to the island."

Kennard looked toward the bluffs, for the moment wondering whether he could make a better stand with his back to them, and rapidly concluded that the island was his best position. Besides, he would have to make a running fight

to get to the bluffs, whereas the island was but a few paces away.

"Johnson!"

"Yes, sir."

"Take a dozen men and go over to the other bank and cover those men bringing back the ammunition chests. The rest of you take position on the island around the pine tree. Line the sides, take cover as much as you can. Those that have horses bring them along. When they are killed they will serve as breastworks and if the worst comes to the worst, they will give us food. Now, Miss Benham!"

He took her by the hand, Mah-wissa following, and the whole command scrambled down the low bank, tramped through the sand, splashed through the river, and gained the island, those who had horses leading them over. The whole movement took much less time than is required to tell about it.

They would have been attacked directly had not the dash of Chambers and his men for the ammunition boxes provided a diversion to the island retreat. The Indian Chief detached a heavy force to intercept these men, but Cham-

bers and the frontiersmen did n't lose any time. They grabbed up the heavy chests and came back toward the island on a dead run.

Meanwhile Johnson and his detachment gained the bank, deployed and opened fire with their heavy Winchesters as the Indians came in range, knocking some of them off their horses. Under cover of this confusion the whole party finally got back to the others on the island. There was ammunition enough in the rescued chests, in addition to what they carried in their cartridge belts, for all practical purposes, especially if it were husbanded; and the men on that island were not men to throw away any shots, or to waste precious cartridges voluntarily.

They had succeeded in saving perhaps a dozen horses, including those of the officers, which had been tied in a different place from the large corral. They haltered these about in the thick undergrowth around the island, knowing that the poor beasts would soon be shot, but while they lived they would afford some protection to the troop.

The soil of the island was sandy. It rose on

an average not more than three or four feet above the level of the stream. There was no cover except the big pine where it was highest. Between two of the long piles of stones marking the graves of the three dead, Kennard had placed the woman he loved. Next to her in the corresponding shallow he put Mah-wissa. The Indian woman strongly objected to this, but she succumbed to his stern gestures. Saddles, of which two or three had been brought, were piled in front of these two hollows against the pine tree. The women were told to lie down at the peril of life. So long as they lay down they were comparatively safe, except from a plunging fire. A rapid glance at either bank of the stream convinced Kennard's practiced eye that not much shelter would be needed to protect them from that. The safety of the women attended to, he looked to his men.

They had scattered themselves around in a circle, tangent at its upper end to the pine tree. They were hidden somewhat from observation by the bushes, but these afforded no protection from shots. The Indians would undoubtedly line the banks with riflemen and the island

would be swept by bullets as with a besom without delay.

"Every man," said Kennard, rectifying the line here and there, "will lie down on his face at once and make himself a rifle pit. Scoop the earth out from in front of you with your hands, tin pans, cups, knives, or whatever you 've got, and pile it up and keep slipping backwards until you have made a hole as long as you are. Then creep forward and you will be under cover and sheltered. Quick! They 'll be on us in a moment."

He had scarcely spoken before sharp volleys rang out from either bank and a perfect hail of bullets swept over the island. Every horse was shot. Some were only wounded, and their wild screams, most hideous of battle noises, mingled with the rapid rattle of rifle fire and the yells of the Indians. Some of the wounded animals plunged so wildly at their halters that the troopers themselves shot them to put them out of their misery.

The first discharge had not brought any casualty, perhaps on account of the horses; but when they fell, and a clear sweep over the island

was thus made. The next volley was marked by a shriek of agony. The scout nearest the Captain had been hit and was terribly wounded.

"Where's the medicine chest?" cried Kennard.

"I reckon it fell into the hands of the Injins," answered Johnson. "You see, Noble, whose business it was to look after it, was killed last night."

Kennard shook his head. There was no use repining. He bent over the scout. As he did so a bullet ripped across his bended back, tearing his coat, but not otherwise harming him.

"Lie down, Cap'n Kennard!" cried Johnson.

"Yep, take cover!" called one of the men.

"If you don't git down yourself, we'll all git up," cried a third.

Kennard had been standing up, encouraging his men. Why he had not already been hit was a marvel. The underbrush, which was falling like grass before a mower, under the sheets of lead the Indians poured upon the island, had perhaps afforded him concealment.

"Captain Kennard!" cried Amy, sitting up in

her recess, "if you don't lie down I will come and stand by your side!"

Thus adjured, Kennard sank to his knees.

"Get down!" he cried, surprised, if he had thought of it, at the harshness in his voice, as he looked at Amy Benham.

He next turned toward the men, who had risen to their knees.

"Down!" he cried. "By Heavens!" as there seemed to be some hesitation in compliance, "I will have obedience on this island."

"We only want to git you down, too, Cap'n," protested one of the men.

"I 'll look out for myself," was the reply. "I am here to look out for all of you. Now, men, when you see an Indian, fire, but don't shoot unless you do. We must make every shot tell and waste nothing. You will have plenty of chances before we get through with this. Mind! no reckless firing!"

As he spoke, he went crawling about the little circle, repeating his words. When he came abreast of Meekins, whose rifle had just been discharged, the scout remarked, with grim satisfaction:

"Well, I got one of 'em."

"What do you think of it, Meekins?"

"I ain't had much time to think," was the reply. "I guess we won't any of us need our think tanks when we git through with this."

"Why not?"

"We won't any of us have any left!" was the foreboding answer.

"How many of them do you suppose there are?"

"I calkerlate there are about six hundred, bucks, I mean, an' look at the wimmen an' childern!"

He turned his head toward the cliffs and foothills, now swarming with squaws and boys and girls.

"Thank God," said Kennard, quickly, "that they at least are not armed!"

"They 'll be in at the death all right," said Meekins.

"Yes; we may have to deal with them by and by. Who are they, do you think?"

"It 'll be Roman Nose's band, sure. They 're Cheyennes, Sioux, an' Dog Soldiers. They belong to him. The Half Breed an' them that

was killed yesterday was a detachment of it. It 's the same crowd we fought back on the river. You see they 've got their wimmen an' childern an' everything else with 'em!"

"What do you advise?"

"You know as well as I, Cap'n."

"Yes, there is nothing to do but stay here and fight it out to the last. God help those women!"

"The squaw kin look out for herself. It 's the white gal I 'm thinkin' of!"

"And I! There 's no way of our getting out!"

"None on earth!"

"Men," said Kennard, raising his voice, "we have nothing to do but stay here and fight it out. We are never going to let those Indians get hold of Miss Benham!"

"You bet your life we ain't, Cap'n!"

"I will give her a revolver, and if the worst comes to the worst, the last man must save a shot for her."

"Two shots," exclaimed old Colonel Morris, "one for her and one for himself."

"We 're not all in yet, Miss Benham," cried a third. "There 'll be some dead Injins before they git you!"

"We 'll die fer you right here on our bellies on this island," yelled a fourth.

This conversation was not continuous. It was punctured at frequent and irregular intervals by rapid but harmless discharges from the Indians, and sharp, sudden cracks from the rifles of the men. The bushes had all been mowed down by this time, or so thinned as to afford no concealment. The island was covered with smoke. In the midst of the commotion the sun shone suddenly and brilliantly up behind the eastern range, filling the valley with golden light.

By this time, in his crawling inspection tour, Kennard had reached Amy Benham again.

"Don't move or raise your head," he said softly, laying his hands on her feet. "I will slide this extra Winchester along until you can get hold of it, and at your feet as far as I can push it to you, is a spare revolver. There is one for you, too, Mah-wissa, in case you wish to fight."

"Me fight for Amee!" answered the squaw, reaching out her hand to clutch the rifle.

"Will we ever get out of this alive?" asked the white sister.

"I don't know. I pray God so! It is too terrible to think that you should be rescued last night only for this!"

"At least we are together!"

"Yes, and the last cartridge on the island will be for you. We will never let you fall into their hands alive."

"I will save one myself for that," said the girl resolutely. "Indeed, I had the point of my knife at my heart when you swept by last night."

"I saw you. I was wild with fear lest we should be a moment too late. Now, I must go to the men. Here is my knife. I want you to dig down and make your place of concealment larger."

"I am so useless," mourned the girl.

"Nonsense, you are the inspiration of us all. We would fight to the end in any event, but we will fight harder with you to protect."

"We 'll fight like hell itself, Miss," said old Johnson, who was near, "an' all on account of you!"

CHAPTER XXV

THE LAST RIDE OF THE CHEYENNES

AS the morning wore on, the battle became faster and more furious on the part of the Indians. Naturally, with their great numerical superiority, they wanted to end things in a hurry. The white men, however, settled down to make a long fight of it.

During the infrequent intervals of firing they dug the rifle pits deeper and deeper. Gradually there arose around the circle perhaps thirty or forty feet in diameter, a little breastwork, the trench being on the inside, in which the men could lie. Before it was completed, however, a number of rough riders were killed, and several more or less severely wounded. Kennard, himself, was shot in the fleshy part of his left arm, but made little of it, especially after Amy Benham had bound it up. The wounded, some of whom were terribly hurt, suffered the most. The canteens of the men had

been filled, and water, muddy but drinkable, could be had by digging deep enough in the low parts of the enclosure, so they were not inconvenienced from thirst; but there was no surgeon and even the small remedies that the scantily provided medicine chest would have afforded were impossible since it had been lost.

Amy Benham, followed by Mah-wissa, who never parted from her for a moment, crawled about among the stricken men, doing what she could for them. Kennard had remonstrated with her, and had begged her not to do it, but she told him that she would die of suspense and inaction unless she were permitted to help, and he realized her influence, not merely upon the wounded men, but upon the others. She was surrounded by forty men who loved her, for there was not a man on that little space of lost ground, which she had most appropriately named "Sullivan's Island," who would not have died a thousand deaths for her.

Practically the island was far enough from the cliffs to render any rifle firing from such elevation innocuous. The Indians tried it, indeed, but to little avail. The wonted bad marks-

manship of the savage stood the beleaguered in good stead. If the Cheyennes had been better shots, and had been more composed and careful, the Americans would have been picked off one by one. It brought back remembrances of days of old, of which his father, who also had been a soldier, had told him, when Kennard observed that several of his men were being wounded with arrows. The Indians essayed a plunging fire by shooting arrows into the air and dropping them into the island enclosure. So soon as this was resorted to, the men drew their blankets over them, at old Meekins' suggestion, and some protection was afforded in that way.

Arrows dropping from the skies, bullets sweeping over them like driven rain, wounded men groaning in pain and wild yells resounding from every Indian, completed a scene of demoniac horror.

Kennard took his position at the head of the island, which looked northward up the valley down which the Indians had come. It was the best place whence to observe what was going on, and the best place from which to keep the whole of his little command under his eye. Old

Colonel Morris took the lower part. Johnson looked after one side and Chambers the other.

About noon, the fire from either bank, which had been practically continuous, seemed to be slackening a little. Meekins crawled up to the young Captain, who was using his rifle whenever he could do so in spite of his pain-racked arm.

"Cap'n," he said, "there 's somethin' up! They 're massin' yonder around that bend!"

"What are they going to do?"

"I can't tell. If I could git up that pine," he looked longingly at the great tree, "I could git a view of the hull country. I b'lieve I 'll—"

He began to rise as he spoke. Kennard instantly dragged him down to the earth again.

"Old man," said he grimly, "you would be shot to pieces as soon as they saw you. Even they could not fail to hit you!"

"Yep, I s'pose that 's so," admitted Meekins, reluctantly abandoning the idea. "Look there!" he pointed ahead.

A stalwart figure, naked as on the day he was born, except for a breech clout, and a bright scarlet officer's sash which he had got in some treaty years before, which was drawn tight

around his middle, trotted out into the open bed of the river. In his hand he swung lightly above his head a long and heavy rifle. His war bonnet consisted of two buffalo horns, springing from a corona of eagles' feathers, which trailed far behind him in the fresh breeze. He wore moccasins upon his feet and a cartridge belt at his waist. He was riding a splendid white horse, not the ordinary Indian pony, and would have stood full six feet two or three inches on the ground. He would have been a fine match for Big Sullivan, more light, perhaps, and a little more slender, certainly, but beautifully, magnificently proportioned. He sat his restive horse easily, just out of rifle range, and intently surveyed the camp.

"Do you know who that is?" said Kennard.

"Roman Nose," was the prompt reply. "I 've seed him often. That 's the old man, sure!"

"What 's he up to, now?"

"I can't tell yet."

As they watched him, a great horde of Indians came crowding down over the low bank and formed up irregularly behind the Chief. There appeared, with the suddenness of a trans-

formation-scene in a theater, scores and scores of half-naked, painted, plumed horsemen lined up in the valley. One or two of the frontiersmen lying at the end of the island sent bullets up toward the group, but they evidently fell short, for no attention was paid to the shooting, and Kennard ordered it discontinued. The river made a slight bend, perhaps thirty or forty yards from the pine tree, otherwise it ran straight away to the place where the Indians were congregated.

As the Captain and the scout watched them, Roman Nose turned and seemed to be haranguing his warriors. Presently they formed into a sort of an irregularly massed column.

"Look!" explained the officer, "there must be one hundred and fifty of them in the front rank and God knows how many they are deep."

Although the river was now but a shallow brook, in the rainy season it was a broad and powerful stream, and its bed would easily admit of that number of horsemen forming in a line abreast. Kennard noticed that they filled it from bank to bank and he could not see how many lines followed the first.

"What are they going to do, I wonder?" queried old Meekins uncertainly.

What they were about to attempt was something the like of which neither he nor any one had ever seen before, nor would ever see again in the savage warfare of the plains.

"If they were white men, soldiers, that is," answered the Captain, "I should think they were preparing to charge."

"But whoever heerd of a body of Injins chargin' down on a comp'ny of men like this, all dead shots an' under cover, an' in broad daylight," exclaimed the old trapper.

"I never did."

"No more did I, an' I can't believe they're goin' to do it."

"I don't know. That Roman Nose is a soldier all right. He is brave enough for anything."

"Well, I'll grant you that," admitted the scout, "but how's he to git them fellers to come after him?"

"You know what one brave man can do with even a crowd of ordinary men."

"Yep, I sure does, an' them fellers yonder

must be fairly thirstin' to git at us. You see, we wiped out the Half Breed's band, and before that we cut Yellow Foot an' his crowd to pieces. There must have been two or three got away though."

"Of course," said Kennard, "and they brought him down upon us. He is going to try to end it all with one smashing blow."

"It 's like one of them old-fashioned turneyments I read about when I was a kid, ain't it?"

"Yes, only no tournament was ever fought with such a prize in view."

He paused and looked back at Amy Benham lying at full length beside one of the men who was badly wounded. She was carefully bathing a jagged arrow wound in his cheek with water from her canteen.

"You mean the honor of the gal?"

"I do!"

"Cap'n Kennard, we 've all swore, me an' the boys, a solemn oath, that she 'll never fall into the hands of them red devils!"

"And I have sworn it, too!" said the soldier, extending his hand to the old trapper, who shook it vigorously. "Look," he exclaimed, staring

ahead again after a little pause, "there's another one!"

"Yep, that'll be the medicine man," replied the trapper.

A gaudily bedizened and bedecorated figure had ridden out from the crowd and had taken a position a little to the rear and some twenty yards away from Roman Nose. This medicine man wore a brilliantly painted war shirt. In his gay color he presented a strange contrast to the statuesque bronze Indian Hercules who had command.

"Them medicine men is the very devil for raisin' hell gener'ly," continued Meekins. "I know his breed. He's got 'em all persuaded that he an' them bears a charmed life. I'll look out for him all right, if they're sich fools as to try to ride us down," he added grimly.

"And I will take Roman Nose for my particular quarry," returned Kennard, his eyes sparkling. "How many do you think there are?"

"Well, there must be six or seven hundred of 'em," replied the scout, after a long, critical survey. "You say there'd be about a hundred and

fifty in the first rank, an' there must be at least five ranks, I calkerlates."

"I agree with you."

"They 'd ought to scatter, it seems to me, an' come at us from all pints of the compass."

"They can't. The river bed is not wide enough, and besides, they are going to pour a rifle fire on us from the banks and keep us down until these fellows ride over us."

"We 'll have to chance that, I reckon."

"Yes," said Kennard. "Men," he raised himself on his elbow and waited until he got attention, "Roman Nose is going to try to ride us down. I think we had better cease firing and every man look to his Winchester. Let every man have his magazine full, and his revolver likewise. Keep under cover until the word is given and then every man to his knees. Do not fire until I give the word, and then pour it into them without stint, Winchesters first, after that revolvers. Get the rifles and revolvers of the wounded and dead. The men at this end will have to bear the brunt. Just as soon as the Indians get near enough, the rifle firing from the flanks will stop. They will be

so excited on the banks that they cannot hit us, and anyway we will have to take the risk. The charge has got to be beaten off. If they once get on the island, God help us! I suspect they will veer around on either side of us, and if they do, the men to the right and left and in the rear have to be on the alert. Remember, the last shot of the last man is for the woman!"

"We 'll remember that," cried old Johnson, amid deep cries of approval from the men.

"I know you will," said Kennard. "Now, men, no firing until I give the word!"

There had been a lull in the rifle firing from the banks while he spoke, as the Indians' movements and plans were being coördinated, but it suddenly broke out on either hand with redoubled fury. As it recommenced, Roman Nose, lifting his heavy rifle high in the air, put his horse to a trot. Instantly the whole Indian line followed. At first they rode in silence broken only by a series of wild adjurations from the medicine man.

"They 're comin'!" cried Meekins. "Good God, who ever heerd the like of this! In all my life I never seed no sich charge!"

"Nor I. Steady, men; are you ready?"

"All ready, sir."

"Colonel Morris!"

"Captain Kennard!"

"Look carefully to the rear!"

"I shall."

"Don't let your men get out of hand, Johnson."

"No, sir."

"Chambers?"

"Here, sir."

"No firing until I give you the order."

"We 'll wait."

The trot had become a canter now. The Indians were coming faster. Suddenly, high and clear and terrifying, in such a voice as might be expected to come from such a mighty chest, Roman Nose pealed his war song. Among all the blood-curdling sounds that may fall upon the human ear, there are none that equal in terrifying power the war cry of these fierce eagles of the plains.

As the voice of the great Cheyenne swept through the valley, it was caught up by a thousand bronze throats until even the women and

children on the bluffs repeated it, and such a yell of defiance smote upon the ears of the frontiersmen as would have paralyzed a less experienced body of fighters. But these men had heard Indian warwhoops before. No noise, however appalling to the tenderfoot, was able to shake these veterans of many a desperate adventure.

Kennard looked back at them. He searched their faces carefully, seeing only high resolution, determination, courage, magnificent purpose—the light of battle. He did not have time for more than a brief glance, for the next instant the Indians were at the little bend. The yells of the oncoming savages drowned the rifle firing which had been poured in upon them with redoubled vigor since the advance began. As the Indians approached nearer, however, the volleys suddenly died away. The on-rushing horsemen were perhaps fifty yards away and just whirling around the bend, when Kennard cried sharply:

"Now!"

CHAPTER XXVI

WAR SONG, DEATH SONG, LOVE SONG

EVERY frontiersman rose to his knees, rifle in hand.

"Fire!" roared the Captain.

Forty rifles poured a sheet of steel into the front of the wave of horsemen. The trot had become a gallop. Now it was a mad, overwhelming rush at the highest speed of the horses.

"Again!"

The rifles cracked a second time.

"Once more!"

The young Captain's powerful voice rose high above the deep roar of the battle, and for the third time the shots of death smote the advancing lines.

They were nearer now, frightfully near.

"A fourth time," he cried coolly, his calmness belied by his fiery eyes and flushed face but accentuated by his ever steady voice.

The white men were fighting with beautiful courage that quite matched the marvelous charging spirit of the Cheyennes—there were two great leaders of equal merit in that bloody feud! The Indians were taking punishment which might well have made the bravest and most disciplined falter and give way. The medicine man was down. Great gaps were opened in the crowd. Reeling figures pitched forward and fell. Horses sprawled heavily on the white sand. Men in the rear leaped over ramparts and lines of huddled bodies. The pace was slowing, but they still came indomitably on, Roman Nose, still untouched, in the lead. Many had marked him, but it seemed that some charm protected him.

"Once more!" cried Kennard, and for the fifth time the awful rifles sped their leaden death messengers.

"Again!"

They were at hand now. In mad excitement the frontiersmen stood to their feet, disdaining cover, revolvers in hand, the rapid, splitting crack of their fire marking the different weapon.

Roman Nose was at the island! Out of the smoke and dust his haughty, handsome face burst on the view. Kennard had fired at the madly galloping figure a half dozen times in vain. He was yet unharmed. While he lived the charge would come on. Such was the indomitable spirit of the man and his men, that only death could stop him—and them. If he fell, the charge, a broken wave, would beat upon the island in vain. If not—!

Using it with one hand as if it had been a toy pistol, the Cheyenne leveled his long rifle, pointed it fairly at Kennard, and without checking his horse, pulled the trigger. He had easily recognized the commanding officer of the white men. As he did so, two rifle shots rang out behind the Captain.

Amy Benham and Mah-wissa had both risen to their feet with the rest. In uncontrollable excitement the white woman had clutched the Winchester Kennard had given to her, which she well knew how to use. As the painted but strikingly handsome face of the great Indian Chief, alive with battle fire, broke through the smoke, she saw instantly her lover's peril, and

fired point blank at the Cheyenne. Mah-wissa, standing by her side, her lips drawn back from her white teeth, like a snarling animal, had followed her example.

The woman had fired a thought too late for his escape, and yet early enough at least to have saved Kennard's life, for the Chief's mushrooming bullet had struck him in the left shoulder. Had not the Cheyenne's aim been slightly diverted by the simultaneous discharge of the two rifles, his own shot would have gone through Kennard's heart. As it was, Roman Nose threw up his arms, opened his mouth as if to cry again that inspiring shriek, and suddenly collapsed and fell into the smoke, his horse, seemingly shot at the same moment, going down with him. He lay with one outstretched hand upon the island toward which he had ridden with such headlong, superb, death-defying courage.

The next moment the river bed in front was alive with yelling, firing figures. The warriors saw Roman Nose fall, and stopped. The hideous painted faces seemed to writhe in the wavering blue smoke. The oncoming horsemen for the first time drew rein. The delay

was fatal. The ponies were jerked back, they swerved. The mass was divided, one part rushing wildly to the right, another to the left. The white men poured decimating volleys into them as they swept past. Savage endurance and courage had been tested to the utmost. They could stand no more. Madly they broke and fled to the banks on either side.

Magnificently had that charge been led; gallantly had it been followed. It was such a charge as no Indians before had ever made in the whole four hundred years in which white men had been in touch with them. It was such a charge as they would never make again should they live four hundred years longer on this continent. It had only failed because the heroic leader, a veritable War God, an incarnation of the old, old spirit of great fighting, had at last been shot dead in the very moment of success, in the very front of his sweeping horsemen, with his hand outstretched in triumph to grasp his prey. And that he had fallen by a woman's hand was the very irony of fate itself.

As Amy Benham had fired the shot that saved her lover's life, she had seen Kennard about to

fall. The rifle dropped from her hand. She caught him in her arms and eased him to the ground. The cowboy who was nearest caught up her Winchester and emptied it at the fleeing masses.

Kennard had not lost consciousness. He lay helpless and deathly white in Amy's arms, watching the progress of the battle until the charge had spent itself and then had been repulsed, while the broken wave of men and horses dissipated. His own men were still standing.

"Down!" cried Kennard, putting all the force and power he had left in his voice. "Quick, for God's sake!"

Amy Benham was kneeling by his side. He caught her with his free right hand and forced her to the ground. The men obeyed his words, but some of them lingered a moment, the one fatal moment, for as the rain of bullets began, they fell.

"Good God!" exclaimed Meekins, "look at the bed of the river!"

As far as the eye could see it was covered with dead men and horses; with wounded men and horses.

"We must have got three hundred of 'em," said the scout, surveying the scene long and earnestly. "There ain't been no sich a charge an' a killin' on the continent afore."

From the hills came wild outbursts of wailing, mingled with the screams of the wounded horses. Here and there up the river bed an Indian would be seen to move. Keen eyes were waiting for such attempts, and those who tried it found that the slightest evidence of life meant instant death.

"Colonel Morris," cried Amy Benham in one of the pauses of the conflict; "Mr. Johnson, will you crawl up here? Mr. Chambers will look out for things a few moments, please."

The two men were soon by the side of Kennard and the scout.

"Have you got it bad, Captain Kennard?" asked Colonel Morris.

"Bad enough, but I 'm worth a dozen dead men, yet, Colonel. Meekins," asked Kennard, faintly, "do you think they can do any better than that?"

"Nobody on earth can do any better than that," replied the trapper earnestly. "We 're

safe enough from another dash like that. Roman Nose is gone, an' the medicine man, an' I take it they ain't got no one else to lead 'em."

"I guess that 's about right," said Johnson, who had enjoyed long experience in Indian fighting.

"I think so, too," said Morris. "I never saw a finer charge in my whole four years of fighting. Why, our Jeb Stuart or your Phil Sheridan could n't have come on more gallantly than that fellow did! I 'd like to get hold of him and get his sash and gun."

"He 's lyin' out there not ten feet from the pine tree," said Meekins.

"It 'd be certain death to try it," said Johnson.

"Of course," the Captain remarked; "let no man try to leave this enclosure without my permission."

"You wish me to assume command because of your wound, Captain Kennard?" asked Colonel Morris, formally.

"Not yet, sir. I will retain the command as long as I am able. I called you here for words of advice, a council of war, if you please. It is my opinion that having tried to ride us down

and failed, they will now try to starve us out. We cannot get away; there are too many wounded. We have not a horse left. If we go out in the open they would cut us to pieces in ten minutes. We will have to get word of our plight back to Colonel Wainwright. He ought to be in camp at Tear Lake by this time. Morris, ask for two volunteers to go. It is a desperate risk, but it has to be done, else they will get us all in the end."

"I understand, Captain; I will see that it is done."

"Very well; now get back to your places and keep a constant lookout. Do not let the men waste their cartridges."

"We hope you 'll be all right, Cap'n," said Johnson, as they crawled away.

"Never fear," answered Kennard. "We shall escape sooner or later; I am certain of it. God has not permitted us to rescue this lady to give her up again."

He spoke as loud as he could in order that his words might be heard by the men, who again signified their approval and acquiescence by a hoarse but undaunted cheer.

"Had it not been for you," he said softly, reaching out for her hand, where she lay by his side in the trench of the shallow rifle pit, "I should have been done for. My revolver was empty. In another second that Indian would have had me."

Later she would think about that shot of hers with horror. At present she was only conscious that she had saved his life.

"I am so glad," she murmured, lifting his hand to her lips and kissing it, "that I was there."

"It was a fearful risk you took. Suppose he had shot you instead of me!"

"They don't shoot women, you know," answered the girl significantly. "Does your wound hurt you very much?"

"Not now," said the man softly, "if you love me!"

And overhead the roar of the battle swept on.

CHAPTER XXVII

ON SULLIVAN'S ISLAND

SOMEHOW or other the day dragged on its weary length. Indians, as a rule, are not fond of night attacks. Had Roman Nose been alive, perhaps he would have overcome the natural prejudice of his followers and have assaulted the island under cover of darkness, but his bronze body still lay where it had fallen, just where the water divided at the upper end. The medicine man, too, who might have taken his place, was gone, and the Indians had been so terribly punished that Kennard doubted if any of the remaining chiefs would have power to inspire such a hazardous endeavor. A feeling, therefore, of comparative security possessed him when the night fell. Nevertheless, the most careful watch was kept by details of men on every side. Intermittent firing was kept up during the night by the Indians, but no damage was done, and the men were so utterly ex-

hausted by the frightful strain of the unequal and terrible combat, that those not on watch actually dozed where they lay in the sand, and even the sentries had hard work to keep awake until they were relieved.

Pain forced Kennard to sleeplessness, and sympathy enabled Amy Benham to keep him company, but by and by even these two sank to rest, lying side by side, the woman holding the man's unwounded hand.

About eleven o'clock at night Meekins and a companion stole silently away from the island. They shook hands with Kennard, and without a sound crawled to the lower end, slipped softly into the river and disappeared into the darkness. So far as the rough riders could tell, they were undiscovered, but morning told another story. On a stunted tree, by the bank of the river, a naked, gory, white body hung. It was that of the cowboy who had accompanied Meekins. He had been frightfully mutilated, and had paid with his life for his hazardous attempt to bring succor to his companions.

Counting those who had died in the valley two days before, ten of the little band had been shot

dead, or had succumbed to their wounds. Six, including Kennard, were more or less severely wounded; Meekins was absent, and the command which had originally numbered fifty, all told, was reduced to thirty-three effectives, but those still full of fight.

The day was less eventful than the first period of the siege. The Indians attempted no more charges. They had removed most of their dead from the river bed, and some one, more daring than the rest, had even attempted to get the body of Roman Nose. One of the scouts on the look-out had shot him, and he lay, lariat in hand, at the feet of his leader. Neither did the Indians keep up the volley firing. They appeared to have retired when day broke, and it was not until some one incautiously exposed himself and was shot dead, that the scouts discovered that every cover hid a sharpshooter. The main body had removed to the shelter of the grove of pine trees up the river, to judge from the camp fires, but the banks, and even the bowlders farther away, were lined with Indians. One man, turning over, incautiously lifted his arm and had the bone shattered before he could drop it. On the

other hand, whenever an Indian showed himself he got a bullet through him.

Both sides were exceedingly cautious and casualties were comparatively rare, but the night saw two of the wounded dead, and four more scouts killed, and four more wounded. A few more than a score of the original defenders were left. At this rate, a few days would see them all killed off.

The day had been a frightful one. Out of a cloudless sky the sun had beaten down upon the unprotected island with all its fury. The water had grown warm and insipid. The wounded suffered terribly. To these Amy Benham was an angel of light. The men stifled their moanings as they saw her crawling to their sides, as they felt the touch of her hand upon their fevered brows. They swore in their rough way that they would hold the island for her until hell froze over; that every man should see that no harm came to her and that the last bullet should be at her service.

Kennard had kept up during the day, but at night inflammation set in, in spite of all that Amy Benham, seconded by some of the frontiersmen

who had some little experience with gunshot wounds, could do, and his condition became precarious. Colonel Morris formally assumed the command of those who were left.

That night, two more volunteers slipped away to search for aid. The next morning, as they looked with sickening apprehension, the first things that greeted their eyes were the scalped bodies of the two hanging on the tree by the first one. The Indians were wildly jubilant, and several of them showed themselves incautiously, but were speedily reminded that there was plenty of fight yet left in the indomitable islanders.

The little company of brave defenders was still further reduced, for when daylight enabled the survivors to take the count of one another, it was discovered that Mah-wissa had secretly stolen away.

"Do you suppose?" asked Colonel Morris, who was now in full charge, Kennard being half delirious with fever, "that the squaw has gone over to her friends and betrayed us?"

"No," said Amy Benham; "I am sure she has not."

"What's become of her, then?" asked Johnson.

"She has gone for help."

"Everybody that has tried that is hung over there."

"Except Meekins," put in Chambers.

The three were gathered at Kennard's feet, discussing the situation. The Indians' fire had materially slackened since the day before, and yet there was no doubt that they were still there, but the defense of the island had been made more strong. At Kennard's suggestion the men had improved the hours of darkness in both nights, by throwing up more earth, and joining the spaces between the rifle pits so that quite a little entrenchment had been made. In some places near the head of the island, it was high enough to allow people to sit up.

"What would they do to Mah-wissa if they caught her?" asked Amy.

Her appearance can be imagined better than described. Outwardly, the refined and beautiful white woman had sunk to the degraded, tattered, savage level. Inwardly she was all that

she had been and more. Her spirit, her voice, her bearing, indicated what she was.

"That depends upon what she 'd say to 'em," spoke up Johnson. "She might pretend to be a deserter."

"But if they found her out?"

"I guess they 'd treat her worse than they did the white men, for being a traitor to her crowd!"

"Our hopes, then, depend upon Meekins, and this squaw," said Chambers.

"That 's about it," answered Morris.

"Gentlemen," cried Kennard, who had recovered temporarily from a stupor and had been listening intently to all that had passed, "we have been here three days now, and you have fought such a fight as nobody on this continent has ever fought before; that will be remembered forever! You have done well! I have an idea that the main body of Indians has gone. At any rate, I suggest that you leave me and the other wounded to take our chances here, and that to-night you make a dash for it. They got the others because they went singly, but I believe there are enough

of you left alive, after the lesson you have given these red devils, to get away safely—"

"That 'll do, Kennard," said Colonel Morris, forgetting the respect due to the rank of captain; "you are our Captain. We fought with you, and, by God, we 'll die with you!"

A burst of cracked and hoarse but tumultuous cheers was the answer. The men evidently approved the declaration of the old Confederate.

"If we tried it, an' got away, Cap'n," said old Johnson, "I 'd never hold up my head again."

"Don't be a fool, Kennard," was the remark of young Chambers.

It was all very unmilitary and insubordinate. Kennard laughed feebly, while the tears came into his eyes.

"You are a royal bunch," he said. "We are going to live or die together, then."

"And if you went away," said Amy Benham, who had listened quietly, "you would have to leave me. Captain Kennard and I are to be married, if God lets us escape this peril, and if He does not, I stay here and die by his side."

The third day was like the rest.

The mornings of the fourth and the fifth day

broke with the situation unchanged. The men were ravenous with hunger by this time. They had saved extra supplies from the two days' rations they had carried for the woman, but she had refused to take more than her share. When they had insisted upon it, to emphasize her feelings she had thrown the extra portion into the river. After that they treated her just as one of themselves. She starved with the rest.

The stench that arose from the dead bodies of the animals was appalling. They strove to eat mule and horse meat, but revolted from the nauseating mess. There was no continuous firing on these days, but when Kennard, on the afternoon of the fifth, asked four of the men to raise him in a blanket as high as their shoulders that he might see the surrounding country for himself, there was a sudden volley from a little coppice near by. One of the men fell and dropped the corner of the blanket, and Kennard fell upon his wounded arm. Otherwise the men kept close and remained under cover. The Indians were there. How many of them, or in what force, could not be told, but they were still there.

The command was in no condition to travel now. Johnson and some of the others rather thought that the main force of the Indians was in hiding, and that they would be hoping the scouts would be leaving the island and try to get back to the regiment on foot, in which case they could easily massacre them in the open. Whether that could have been tried or not, even had there been no wounded, was a question. They had no horses left. They were exhausted by heat, hard fighting, starvation. There was nothing for them to do but cling like grim death to such shelter as they had, and wait.

Late in the afternoon of the sixth day, when hope had been almost abandoned, a watcher languidly staring across the foot of the island down toward the clefts in the wall, through which the river flowed, and through which they had entered the valley, detected a flash of light. Not being a soldier he could not understand what it was, but he thought best to report it to Colonel Morris. Together they watched it and the veteran finally decided that it must be a heliograph signal which he could not read. Kennard, who was dozing, was awakened, and

with pain-racked body propped himself up and stared.

Yes, it was a signal! He could read it without difficulty!

"Hold on till night! Help is coming!" it said.

As soon as he spelled it out he proclaimed the glad news to the men.

"Can you signal back something?" asked Colonel Morris.

"I could if I had a mirror," was the reply, but there was no mirror with the command.

"How would it do to fire a volley, just to let 'em know we 're livin'?" asked Johnson.

"That 's well thought of," said Kennard, and at a given command, twenty rifles blazed out a triumphant discharge.

Again the heliograph signaled:

"Keep up your courage!"

When he had translated this last message, Kennard's nerve gave way in a revulsion of feeling. His wounded shoulder was in frightful condition. It was Amy Benham who sheltered him from the gaze of the men; it was her hand upon his head, her voice in his ear, that

finally calmed him. She saved him in his weakness; he would never forget that.

The hours that intervened between the receipt of that message and the dark were the longest that any of them on the island had ever spent. With what intensity they watched while the daylight lasted, and listened when darkness came, for the sound of their rescuers, and with what joy they welcomed the hoof-beats of the horses, the eager cries of excited men, splashing through the river, bearing food and drink and medicine, and two surgeons, who without further ado, dropped on their knees beside the wounded.

Hamilton led the party, Kennard's own troop burning to rescue their old commander and get back into his good graces again, and redeem themselves in his eyes for their mutinous conduct in the cañon. They had ridden desperately hard since Meekins, after a frightful journey, had notified them the day before, and all that men and horses could do they had done. With the soldiers was the old hunter, his left arm in a bandage.

"Thank God! you got here," said Kennard weakly.

"I had a close call," said the trapper. "They got poor Lang, an' wounded me, but I was lucky enough to git a pony an' got away. It took me four days to make the journey. Thank God! there are some of you alive still. Where 's Miss Benham?"

"Here."

"Unharmed?"

"Unharmed, thank God and these brave men. And Mah-wissa, have you seen her?"

"No, not a sight of her."

"What 's to be done?" asked Hamilton, who had been busy with the men, looking after the details of feeding and caring for the defenders of the island.

"I think there is a bunch of Indians up there in those pine woods," said Kennard.

"Good! We 'll attend to them. Do you know any other way out of this valley than that by which we came in?"

"No," said Kennard.

"I do," said Amy Benham. "Over that ridge yonder just where you see that big star. We came in that way."

"There is no exit at the upper end?"

"There must be, I think," said Kennard, "for Roman Nose must have come in that way."

"Well, if there are any of his men left, they will have a chance to get out some way if we don't get them ourselves. Come, Bodley, let us get our men and beat up the game."

Dismounting and leaving their horses, and accompanied by some of the frontiersmen, the hardiest among them, who wanted to be in at the death, the party on foot advanced toward the supposed camp in the trees.

The place was empty! Not an Indian to be seen! They paused in uncertainty, not knowing what to do, when, suddenly, they heard a shot fired up in the valley from the direction of the ridge over which Amy and Mah-wissa had come when they had found shelter there.

"They are escaping that way!" said Hamilton. "Come on!"

It was easy to see the outline of the cliffs silhouetted against the sky and stars, and there was no mistaking the direction. Hamilton plunged into the shallow river, and followed by the troopers, ran toward the ridge. No effort at concealment was made, and they had gone but a short

distance when the valley blazed with fire, and shots, mostly over their heads, came hurtling that way.

Not stopping to return the fire, the men ran on. The Indians apparently after that one discharge fled madly for the ridge, with the white men in pursuit.

Just as they reached it, it was topped with black figures, and the next instant a fierce line of flashes ran along the horizon. The escaping savages were at a terrible disadvantage. Again they broke. This time to be met with scathing fire from Hamilton's men, who had been deployed on the run, and now almost encircled the Cheyennes. There were not more than a hundred of them who had been left to observe the besieged. The rest with the women and children had gone on. They were practically surrounded by a hundred soldiers, for from some source and by some reason, the mouth of the ridge over which they had hoped to escape from the valley had been occupied in force. Only the darkness saved the Indians from absolute extermination. As it was, they were cut to pieces. A few of them broke through the encircling line,

killing two troopers who endeavored to stop them, and got clean away.

When the morning came and soldiers scoured the valley, no living Cheyennes were found. At the upper end of the valley they discovered a narrow but practicable trail over which the Indians had come and gone.

Their extermination was due to Mah-wissa. She had not deserted the woman she loved. She had taken advantage of her knowledge of the country to escape from the valley over the ridge by which they had entered it. After incredible hardships she had descended the mountains until she found a place to cross the river in the cañon. She had reached Colonel Wainwright's camp—he was already on the march toward the valley with all the force he had—after Meekins had got there and dashed forward with Kennard's troop, in the hope of effecting a rescue more quickly than if they had delayed for the main body.

Mah-wissa had explained the situation, and told of the ridge, which was a shorter, if harder, trail, and had offered to conduct a troop there.

They had arrived in the very nick of time to be in at the death, as it were.

The death of Roman Nose, and the awful slaughter among his followers, so disheartened them, that the poor remainder of the Cheyennes fled northward and made no attempt to join Crazy Horse, who, thus deserted, was unable to cope with General Crook. The defense of "Sullivan's Island" was the crucial incident of the campaign, and the settlements of the northwest were saved a long summer of terror by the heroic stand made by the gallant frontiersmen, who had held the red warriors at bay.

They buried Roman Nose on the island at the feet of the ranchman. Savage though he was, his valor had been not less conspicuous, his conduct not less intrepid, than that of the white man.

The dead scouts were also interred on the island they had immortalized by their valor. Those of them who were alive were ordered back to Fort McCullough to recuperate.

Surgical skill and careful nursing saved Kennard's life, which at first, on account of his

long neglected wound, had been despaired of. When he was on his feet again, and his rough riders had been disbanded on account of the close of the campaign, there was a wedding at Fort McCullough.

It fell to old Johnson to give the bride away, and every one of the troopers who had survived was honored by attendance upon the groom, now Major Kennard, if you please, with a second medal of honor.

There were few women on the frontier, and most of them were married, so that Amy Benham, "The West Wind," had no one to attend her save a little Indian woman, Mah-wissa, the Blue Bird, dressed for the occasion with all the barbaric finery that she could compass. She stood by her white sister's side in this happy hour, as she had stood by her side in the days of deadly peril which they had both passed through together.

As the young couple drove away in the big army ambulance decorated with white, old Johnson, carefully shifting his quid, made this comment:

"Well, this here wedding would have been

just about perfect, if old Colonel Benham an' big Pat Sullivan had been here."

And yet that was not quite true, after all, for there is no doubt that Sullivan was happier in his lonely grave on the island under the tall pine than he would have been watching the woman he loved married to another man.

THE END

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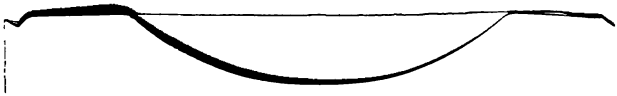

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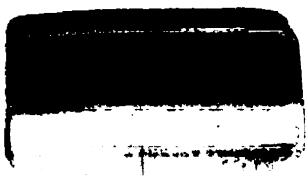

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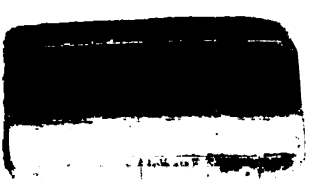
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